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2017 Hughey Lectures

Wednesday 18 January 2017 at 2 p.m.

Dr Ian M. Randall

Ian M. Randall is a Senior Research Fellow of IBTSC Amsterdam and Research Associate of the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide. He is the author of numerous books, including *The English Baptists of the Twentieth Century* (2005), *Rhythms of Revival: The Spiritual Awakening of 1857-1863* (2010), and a study of the Bruderhof Community's spirituality – *Church Community is a Gift of the Holy Spirit* (2014).

He will deliver two lectures on the theme of 'Baptist and Anabaptist Peace Witness: From the First to the Second World Wars'.

Lecture 1

English Baptists and
the Peace Movement

Lecture 2

An Anabaptist
Witness: the
Bruderhof Community



The event will take place in the Chapel of Tyndale Theological Seminary, Egelantierstraat 1, 1171 Badhoevedorp, Amsterdam.

For further information contact David McMillan mcmillan@ibts.eu

While there is no charge for the lectures, those attending will be required to meet their own travel, accommodation, and subsistence costs in Amsterdam.

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Editorial

In this edition we have three articles. In keeping with the goals of this Journal all three articles are written by people who are developing their academic skills, research, and interests. The topics are distinct. This said, each of the articles in its own way demonstrates the importance of Scripture and its application to those within the ‘baptistic’ tradition in relation to Christian mission and practice.

In the first article Tom Oey introduces something of the life and work of Gottlob Brückner (1783-1857), an ethnic German who served as an English Baptist Missionary in Java from 1816 to 1847. Oey argues that, although Brückner’s missionary activity was considered a failure by some, he deserves greater recognition than he has previously received. This is not least the case with respect to his production of the first Javanese New Testament and Javanese tracts, which spurred the conversion of Pak Dasimah and other indigenous Javanese in East Java.

In the second article Mervi Kalmus discusses the attitude of Seventh-day Adventists to the ordination of women. Her particular focus is on the hermeneutics operative in the perspective of those who oppose the ordination of women. Kalmus demonstrates that, although those who hold this position would claim to derive it from a plain reading of authoritative Scripture, various forms of interpretation are either implicitly operative or required. She suggests that acknowledging these hermeneutical approaches may be necessary, not simply to do justice to the Scriptures but to allow the conversation on this particular issue to develop.

In the final article David Lazonby focuses on the Jubilee regulations of Leviticus 25. He places these regulations within their original context in relation to societal problems in the Ancient Near East. From this perspective he suggests the potentially wide ranging contemporary applications of this Jubilee regulation, while seeking to negotiate issues of contextual distance and difference. At the very least this article invites consideration of the application of biblical teaching to current ethical issues, especially those related to the environment, land, and economics.

Revd Dr Stuart Blythe (Rector IBTSC Amsterdam)

Gottlob Brückner (1783-1857): an Ethnic German who Served as an English Baptist Missionary in Java (1816 to 1847)

Thomas G. Oey¹

Introduction

The Lutheran Gottlob Brückner became a missionary of the London Missionary Society at Semarang, Central Java in 1814, and served as an English Baptist missionary in Java until 1847. Brückner was the first ethnic German male to become a Baptist and to be appointed as a Baptist missionary. Charlotte Rumohr, a Danish national, was an ethnic German from what is now Schleswig-Holstein in Northern Germany. The second wife of William Carey, she served with him on the mission field in Serampore, India from their marriage in 1808 until her death in 1821.² Brückner was an important missionary pioneer who combined the eighteenth-century German missionary Pietism of Halle and the Moravians with the reforming ideals of the Baptist missionary, William Carey. Brückner became a Baptist in 1816, two years after the future German founder Johann Gerald Oncken migrated to Britain and eighteen years prior to Oncken's baptism in Hamburg. Although they had differing ministry contexts, all three ethnic Germans — Rumohr, Brückner, and Oncken — adapted to English-speaking environments during the European crisis of the Napoleonic Wars of 1806 to 1815. In common with many Baptist missionaries of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were ultimately inspired by the reformist ideals of Carey.

Although some scholars consider Brückner as unsuccessful in developing a Christian church in central Java during his missionary work up to 1847, the year that English Baptists discharged him as a missionary, his main contributions were the production of the first Javanese New Testament

¹ Thomas G. Oey (PhD Vanderbilt University) is a PhD candidate in Global Studies at Leipzig University. This article is adapted from a chapter 'Gottlob Brückner' in his *Portraits of Baptist Missionaries in Asia*, typescript, 2013-2014, pp. 21-60, and from a manuscript for a chapter section of his dissertation, 'German, British and Women Missionaries and Indigenous Actors in Dutch Colonial Java, 1814-1847: Translocal Encounters and Incipient Social Reform Mentalities: A Comparative Cultural History of Java and the West.' The author gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance of the German Academic Exchange Service which made possible its presentation at a conference at International Baptist Theological Study Centre Amsterdam in November 2015. He thanks Thomas van den End for providing comments and corrections.

² Some details of Charlotte Rumohr Carey's life are found in S. Pearce Carey, *William Carey* (London: The Carey Press, 1923), pp. 209, 292-4, 372-4.

and Javanese tracts, which spurred the conversion of Pak Dasimah and other indigenous Javanese in East Java.³ Some of these converts in turn participated in mission work in central Java prior to Brückner's death in 1857. In 1945 English Baptist historian Ernest Payne devoted a book chapter to Brückner's biography. In 1974 J.L. Swellengrebel of the Dutch Bible Society, utilizing Dutch sources, wrote a chapter about him. American Southern Baptist William N. McGrath also wrote a brief biography in 1987.⁴ However, Brückner has remained relatively unknown among Baptists on the European Continent from which he originated.

The biographical portraits present the main facts of Brückner's European origins and missionary education. He was born in Linda, Upper Lusatia, in 1783. His home town, located not many miles from the German entrepôt Görlitz, was at the time part of German Saxony. Since 1945 it has been named Platerówka and lies in the southwest corner of Poland, next to its border with Germany and the Czech Republic. Avoiding military conscription, Brückner migrated to Berlin in 1803 and became a textile worker. He was converted through the ministry of Johann Jänicke, the pastor of the Bohemian (Czech) Lutheran congregation and studied at Jänicke's mission school in Berlin.⁵ Brückner subsequently had further training at the seminary of the Netherlands Missionary Society at Rotterdam (1808-1812), at the Moravian settlement in Zeist (1812), and in England (1812-1813), where he studied theology at the Gosport Academy under the London Missionary Society (LMS) founded by David Bogue (1750-1825).⁶ He was appointed and sent by the LMS as a missionary to Java at the end of 1813. He never returned to Europe, and died in Java in 1857.

In my opinion, Brückner should receive appropriate recognition not only among British Baptists for whom he served as a missionary, and among

³ Philip van Akkeren, *Sri and Christ: a Study of the Indigenous Church in East Java* (London: P. Lutterworth, 1970), p. 70. Yet Johannes Emde and it seems also Brückner had little sympathy for the indigenized Christianity of the East Javanese.

⁴ Ernest Alexander Payne, *South-east from Serampore: More Chapters in the Story of the Baptist Missionary Society* (London, 1945); J.L. Swellengrebel, *In Leijdesckers Voetspoor. Anderhalve Eeuw Bijbelvertaling en Taalkunde in de Indonesische Taalen. Vol. 1, 1820-1900* (Amsterdam, 1974); William N. McElrath, 'Stubborn Saxon Seed Sower: Gottlob Bruckner of Germany and Indonesia', in his *Bold Bearers of His Name* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1987) <http://oreoplace.wordpress.com/2011/05/11/some-of-us-are-stubborn/> (accessed 4 Feb 2013). Courtesy R.G. Tiedemann.

⁵ On the Berlin mission school of Jänicke, see Ledderhose, Karl Friedrich, *Johann Jänicke der evangelisch-lutherische Prediger an der böhmischen oder Bethlehems-Kirche zu Berlin. Nach seinem Leben und Wirken dargestellt* (Berlin: g. Knak Selbstverlag, 1863), pp. 110-130. Ledderhose demonstrates the influence of the Danish- Halle mission in South India and the Moravians on Jänicke's missionary outlook.

⁶ On Rotterdam and Gosport as training centres for the Dutch Missionary Society (1797-1840) and the London Missionary Society (1802-1825), see A. Th. Boone, *Bekering en beschaving: De agogische activiteiten van het Nederlandsch Zendelinggenootschap in Oost-Java (1840-1865)* (Zoetermeer: Bookencentrum, 1997), pp. 22-27; Christopher A. Daily, 'The New Approach to Missions: Gosport Academy and David Bogue's Strategy', chapter in his *Robert Morrison and the Protestant Plan for China* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2013), pp. 37-82.

German Baptists because of his ethnic German background and identity, but also among Dutch Baptists for his significant role in developing the first Javanese New Testament and Javanese tracts, which were catalysts to the development of Christianity in colonial Dutch Java. Brückner mastered the Dutch language and served as a Baptist missionary in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) for some three decades prior to the development of the Baptist movement in the Netherlands in 1845. Hence, if one accepts the term ‘Dutch’ to refer to a linguistic-cultural rather than an ethnic identity, Brückner was also the first ‘Dutch’ Baptist and ‘Dutch’ Baptist missionary. European Baptists should reflect appropriately on their mutual relationship to Javanese Christians to whom they are intimately connected through Brückner’s life and ministry.

The main lines of Brückner’s life and career can be reconstructed from his autobiography and from a series of English, Dutch, and German letters, both published and unpublished, which he wrote over the years.⁷ However, most of the letters were written for promotional purposes for publication in religious media, and so significant gaps remain in our knowledge of him. Moreover, his German letters which were published in the periodical of the Basel Missionary Society, as well as some of his published English letters, have never received attention. This article will focus on two events which demonstrate the differences he had with colonial attitudes on Java: namely, his conversion to becoming a Baptist in 1816, and his conflict with Governor-General van den Bosch in 1831-1834.

Brückner’s Becoming a Baptist (1816)

It is interesting to note that the Lutheran Brückner converted to Baptist beliefs in early 1816, at the end of British administration of Java. The Netherlands India trading company (Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie or VOC) during the period 1740-1799 and the Dutch colonial administrators from 1816 to 1846 placed a ban on missionary work to the Javanese, whom they declared were Muslims.⁸ However, during the brief British administration of 1811 to 1816, the Lieutenant Governor Thomas Stamford Raffles (1781-1826; in Java, 1811-1816) welcomed English Baptist (Baptist Missionary Society or BMS) and Congregationalist and Lutheran (LMS)

⁷ Gottlob Brückner, *Javanese New Testament* (Serampore, 1829. Copy at Netherlands Bible Society, Haarlem); his letters in *Baptist Magazine*, in *Basel Mission Magazin*, 1828 & 1840 & various. Some of his unpublished letters are in archives at Utrecht, the Netherlands and Wuppertal, Germany.

⁸ Andaya, Barbara Watson and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Early Modern Southeast Asia, 1400-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 257; Ernst Frederik Kruijf, *Geschiedenis van het Nedelandsche Zendlinggenootschap en zijne zendingsposten* (J.B. Wolters, 1894), pp. 515-518.

missionaries in Java.⁹ The short-lived Thomas Trowt (1784-1816) played a decisive role in Brückner becoming a Baptist.

When Brückner returned to Semarang after a vacation trip in Java to recover his health, he met Thomas Trowt of the BMS, who had just arrived on 10 May 1815.¹⁰ Sura Adimenggala, the local Javanese regent, had sent two of his sons, Saleh and Shukur, to study at the school of BMS missionary Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) in Serampore, India from 1812 to 1814.¹¹ Trowt befriended Sura Adimenggala, who was open to Western education, and opened a school for Javanese in Semarang.¹² A summary of Brückner's letter published in an English periodical reflected his concern over 'the low state of religion among the people'. Trowt was learning the Malay language and hoped to co-operate with Brückner.¹³

In July 1815, Brückner obtained six English Bibles from British soldiers who were about to depart Java and return to Fort William, India.¹⁴ In early 1816, Raffles paid a final visit to Semarang prior to his departure from Java. He offered encouragement to Brückner in his mission work. Brückner was suffering from dysentery.¹⁵

By the beginning of 1816, towards the end of British administration on Java, Brückner's friendship with his Baptist colleague Thomas Trowt had deepened. Trowt influenced Brückner to become a Baptist. Brückner was troubled in his perception that members of the Semarang Dutch church were immoral persons receiving communion and bringing their illegitimate children for baptism. A book by the English Baptist Dr John Ryland, Jr. (1753-1825) convinced Brückner. After an internal struggle, he decided to give up his position as minister of the Semarang Dutch church. On 24 and 26 February 1816 Brückner wrote to his former mentor Dr Bogue of the LMS

⁹ Although Raffles' relations with missionaries were cordial, and he agreed to become president of a Bible society at Batavia, actually it seems that while an administrator on Java, Raffles, despite the encouragement of his evangelical minister cousin who was a director of the LMS, was largely indifferent to mission work to the Javanese. In the estimation of Syed Muhd Khairudin Aljunied, *Raffles and Religion: A Study of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles' Discourse on Religions amongst Malays*. (Kuala Lumpur: The Other Press, 2004), p. 3, 'Raffles did not have an equal opinion of the varied Malay religions that he encountered during his tour of duty. Neither was he willing to accept that the Malays should maintain the religious beliefs he observed among them. Rather, Raffles had selective, imbalanced and ambivalent stances towards these religions. Such attitudes are attestations of the "shades of alterity" lingering in his mind and perhaps in the minds of most Europeans in his time.'

¹⁰ Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, p. 65.

¹¹ Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, pp. 66-67; Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads*, p. 11.

¹² Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads*, p. 11.

¹³ John Edwards Caldwell, ed., *The Christian Herald*, 1 (New York: 1816), p. 381. *The Christian Observer*, 15 (1816), p. 855.

¹⁴ *Thirteenth Report of the British and Foreign Bible Society*, (1817), p. 21.

¹⁵ Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, p. 67.

and to Dr Ryland, the director of the BMS in London, with the information of his decision to become a Baptist.¹⁶

In his farewell sermon at the Semarang Dutch church on 31 March 1816, Brückner informed the church of his decision to become a Baptist, and referred the validity of this decision to a Bible text of John 5.39 in which Jesus uttered the challenge to ‘search the scriptures’.¹⁷ Trowt baptized Brückner and John Shaw, a private of the 78th regiment, by immersion in the river of Semarang on 7 April 1816.¹⁸ Brückner invited the church elders and his family members to witness the baptism. He later wrote in his autobiography that, despite ridicule and criticism, ‘My baptism, disastrous as it was to my worldly circumstances, was attended and followed by an unspeakable peace and joy in my soul.’¹⁹ A half-year later, Trowt became exhausted by the study of the Javanese language, and suffered from dysentery and fever. Brückner was present when Trowt died at Salatiga on 24 October 1816.²⁰

After his baptism, Brückner no longer received his government sponsored monthly salary of 150 Spanish dollars. He stayed at Trowt’s house. He wrote to the English Baptist Mission in Serampore, India, and to the Committee of the BMS in London. His application was noted at the annual meeting of the BMS in Birmingham, England, 9-11 October 1816.²¹ Brückner was accepted as a Baptist missionary in 1817. He was allowed by the Baptist missionary William Ward (1769-1823) in Serampore to draw a salary at the same amount as Trowt’s, and received an appointment as agent of the BMS from Dr Ryland in London.²²

Brückner’s conversion to the Baptists reflected his wariness of identifying religion with the colonial way of life. His mentality was an emphasis on individual conversion as the path to social reform.²³

¹⁶ G. Brückner [Brückner], letter to Dr Bogue, Samarang, 24 February 1816; letter to Dr Ryland, Rembang, 26 February 1816, published in *American Baptist Missionary Magazine*, 1 (March 1817), 59-62.

¹⁷ Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, p. 68.

¹⁸ T. Trout, Samarang, 10 April 1816; letter to Marshman, cited in *American Baptist Magazine, and Missionary Intelligencer*, 1 (1817), p. 101; McElrath, ‘Gottlob Bruckner’.

¹⁹ Gottlob Brückner, autobiographical fragment, cited in Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, pp. 68-69.

²⁰ William Robinson, Westreevden, letter to Mr Ivimey, Nov. 7, 1816, cited in *The Baptist Magazine*, 9 (1817), p. 153; Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads*, p. 11.

²¹ *The Baptist Magazine*, 8 (1816), p. 478.

²² Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, p. 70.

²³ As the sources for Brückner are fragmentary, it would be difficult to determine from them precisely what were his ideas for social reform. However, they might be inferred by some of his activities directed toward the conversion to Christianity of the Javanese people and by the general contexts in which he operated. The view that Christian mission was merely an integral aspect of colonialism, and that missionaries were ‘cultural imperialists’ attempting to colonize the mentalities of indigenous persons, has been argued by John L. and Jean Comaroff, *Of Reason and Revelation*, Vol. 1, *Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*; Vol. 2: *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991). However, scholars taking a more sympathetic view towards Christianity, and acknowledging that Christianity has become a world religion, take more nuanced views.

Brückner's Conflict with Governor-General van den Bosch over the Distribution of his Javanese New Testament and Tracts (1831-1834)

During his first term as missionary on Java from 1814 to 1828, Brückner conducted evangelistic activities and distributed portions of the Javanese New Testament, which he was in the process of translating. He finally completed the translation in 1824, and also prepared a Javanese grammar. The printing of his Javanese New Testament was delayed by another year, and then the Dutch Governor-General Baron Godert van der Capellen (1778-1848; in Java 1816-26) refused its printing after the outbreak of the 'Java War', an uprising led by Prince Diponegoro (1785-1855) of Yogyakarta from 1825 to 1830.²⁴ Brückner was personally disrupted by the advance of insurgents on Salatiga in 1825. His opposition to revolution as a strategy for social change may have reflected his socially conservative Lutheran background. Much as Luther himself had reacted to a German peasant uprising of 1525 some three centuries earlier, Brückner viewed revolution negatively, but he also saw it as God's punishment of the 'pride' of the colonialists. On 13 May 1826, Brückner wrote from Semarang to the Basel Mission Society:

You can see that I still find myself in Samarang because the south portion of the country is troubled constantly by mighty uproar. The danger is still as great as it was six months ago, even though thousands of people have already sacrificed their

Mission historian Dana L. Robert, in her introduction to *Converting Colonialism: Visions and Realities in Mission History, 1706-1914* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), p. 4 asserts, 'Rather than assuming that missionaries in all times and places supported colonialism, it is more accurate to speak in ambiguous terms of missionary efforts to "convert" it.' Writing of the period 1815-1850, Andrew Porter, *Religion versus empire? British Protestant missionaries and overseas expansion, 1700-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 116, argues, 'In order to give effect to their religious imperatives, British missions and those who organized them had been forced to come to terms with the real worlds of political authority and economic activity. However, the unanticipated extent of this accommodation was seen neither as inescapable surrender nor as a source of perpetual dependence.' Porter also argues, p. 318, 'missionary work and education, despite their manifest limits often had a vital liberating impact and was welcomed for that reason.' Similarly the German scholar Horst Gründer, 'Mission und Kolonialismus—Historische Beziehungen und strukturelle Zusammenhänge', in Wilfried Wagner, (Hrsg.) *Kolonien und Missionen. Referate des 3. Internationalen Kolonialgeschichtlichen Symposium 1993 in Bremen*. (Münster: Lit Verlag, 1994), p. 36, fully acknowledges missionaries were colonialists, yet argues that nonetheless their converts took advantage of the Christian education to overcome colonial dominance for their emancipation. The Rotterdam seminary of the Netherlands Missionary Society and the Gosport Academy of the LMS, institutions at which Brückner studied and referenced above, emphasized the study of indigenous languages, Bible translation, production of grammars and dictionaries, the dissemination of the Bible and religious tracts as both religious and literacy activities, theological education of indigenous converts, and basic medical training. Major William Thorn, *The Conquest of Java*, 368, a participant in the British colonial period in Java, wrote in favour of 'the blessing of Christian revelation' for Java in 1815: 'Reform, therefore, to be effectual among a people who are naturally attached to the very corruptions which oppress them, must be progressive, and the light of religious truth, from the salutary influence of which so many permanent blessings are justly to be expected, should be diffused with all the wisdom and prudence becoming its divine origins and immense importance.'

²⁴ Peter B.R. Carey, *The Power of Prophecy: Prince Dipanagara and the End of an Old Order in Java, 1785-1855* (Leiden, 2007).

lives, and only the Lord knows where things will lead in the end. What a punishment of God for the pride and arrogance, and the forgetfulness of God, that was so prevalent among us! They may serve to our best, and it is not consumed with us in this country.²⁵

Although his mentality overlapped with colonialist opposition to revolution, yet Brückner differed fundamentally from the colonial officials on the issue of distributing the Javanese New Testament and introducing Christianity to the Javanese people as a method of social reform. Because he was forbidden to print the Javanese New Testament in Java, Brückner received assistance from his colleague Medhurst to raise funds from the English Baptist Mission in Serampore, India. From 1828 to 1831 he oversaw the printing of his Javanese New Testament and Javanese tracts and a Javanese grammar in Serampore at the Serampore mission press and had the opportunity to personally encounter William Carey.²⁶

Supplied with his newly printed Javanese New Testaments and tracts, in 1831 Brückner left Serampore, full of enthusiasm for pursuing his mission work:

I think, taking things connectedly, our mission—I mean the Baptist Mission—has not been fruitless to that nation (i.e., the Javan): yea, it has even been the means that other denominations of Christians have turned their eyes upon Java. Our Mission in this island has been the precursor in the great work of evangelizing this numerous people; and I hope not to withdraw my hand from the plough, especially now, as I have so many means at my disposal.²⁷

However, Java had significantly changed circumstances. The ending of the Java War in 1830 did not change the policy of the prohibition of distribution of Christian materials in Java. On the contrary, the new Governor-General Johannes van den Bosch (1780-1844, in Java 1830-1833) had instituted the ‘cultivation system’ in 1830. The ‘cultivation system’ was an exploitative method of colonial rule which imposed a feudalistic system for the cultivation and collection of agricultural products on Java. The Javanese peasants were reduced to a state of slavery and suffered significant deprivations.²⁸ Van den Bosch did not wish social reform activities of the

²⁵ Evangelische Missions-Gesellschaft in Basel, *Magazin für die neueste Geschichte der protestantischen Missions*, 1828, Erstes Quartalheft, 132-133. Translation. The original German: ‘Sie sehen, daß ich noch immer in Samarang mich befinde, da die südlichen Theile des Landes fortwährend von mächtigem Aufruhr beunruhigt sind. Die Gefahr ist heute noch so groß, als sie vor sechs Monaten war, obgleich Tausende von Menschen bereits ihr Leben aufgeopfert haben; und nur der Herr weiß, wohin die Sache am Ende führen wird. Welch eine Züchtigung Gottes für den Stolz und Uebermuth, und die Gottesvergessenheit, die so herrschend unter uns war! Möge sie zu unserm Beßten dienen, und es nicht gar aus mit uns in diesem Lande werden.’

²⁶ McGrath, ‘Bruckner’; Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, pp. 74-75.

²⁷ Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, p. 75.

²⁸ A significant study of the ‘cultivation system’ is Cornelis Fasseur, *The Politics of Colonial Exploitation: Java, the Dutch, and the Cultivation System*, trans. R.E. Elson and Ary Kraal (Ithaca, New York: Studies on Southeast Asia, 1992). The early history of the cultivation system on Java, 1830-1840, is discussed by

missionaries W.H. Medhurst in Batavia, Brückner in Semarang, W. Gunsch and J. Emde in Surabaya, and the Bible translator J.F.C. Gericke in Surakarta to interfere with his plan to reimpose a feudal system in Java; he ordered that Javanese would not be permitted to convert to Christianity at Surabaya.²⁹ Significant restrictions remained in place over the next two decades. Yet, beginning in a village in East Java, the co-operative work of the missionaries resulted in an indigenous Christian movement that was entirely outside the sphere of Dutch influence or control.

After his return to Java in 1831, Brückner delivered 2,100 copies of his Javanese New Testament to the Dutch East Indies Bible Society (Nederlandsch Oost-Indisch Bijbel-Genootschap) at Batavia. Brückner returned to Semarang on 12 July 1831.³⁰ Brückner arranged to send copies of his Javanese New Testament to the Dutch King William I (1772-1843) as well as to the Prussian King Frederick William III (1770-1840, reigned 1797-1840).³¹ Upon returning to Semarang, Brückner immediately encountered difficulties from Dutch authorities when he tried to distribute his tracts to the Javanese. The tracts excited so much attention in Semarang, that crowds, including persons who had travelled forty or fifty miles, came to his house to obtain copies. Brückner was arrested by the police and banished to Batavia. He was prohibited from distributing his Javanese New Testament or tracts, as the BMS historian Francis August Cox writes, 'lest it should excite insurrection!'³²

Brückner was banished from Semarang to Batavia. At Batavia he made an appeal to the colonial authorities. Medhurst reported on 30 January 1832 that Brückner's banishment was repealed.³³ The Secretary of the Netherlands East Indies Bible Society requested permission from the Governor-General Van den Bosch to distribute the Javanese New Testaments, which was refused. On 2 February 1832, the Javanese New

Robert Van Niel, *Java's Northeast Coast, 1740-1840: A Study in Colonial Encroachment and Dominance*. (Leiden: Research School CNWS, Leiden University, 2005), pp. 353-396.

²⁹ *Chinese Repository*, Vol. 1 (September 1832), no. 5, pp. 203-204, cited in David Abeel, *Journal of a Residence in China, and the Neighboring Countries, from 1829 to 1833* (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1834), pp. 190-191; Alfred Wesselmann, *Eberhard Hermann Röttger (1800-1888): Missionar in Niederländisch-Indien: Pfarrer in Lengerich und Lotte* (Münster: agenda, 2008), p. 39; Swellengrebel, *In Leijdesckers Voetspuur*, pp. 52-53; Walter Henry Medhurst, Batavia, 7 March 1831 letter (published in *Evangelical Magazine*, p. 501); 8 August 1831 letter.

³⁰ Swellengrebel, *In Leijdesckers Voetspuur*, p. 43.

³¹ Payne, *South-east from Serampore*, p. 76.

³² *Missionary Records: China, Burmah, Ceylon etc. etc.*, Vol. 2, p. 134; Francis August Cox, *History of the English Baptist Missionary Society: From A.D. 1792 to A.D. 1842* (Boston: Isaac Tompkins, 1844), p. 171. In the early 1830s, about the same time as the interest of Javanese in Semarang in Brückner's tracts, Scot-Malay Richard James MacMootry developed an independent Catholic church which focused on biracials and Javanese children in Semarang. Karel Steenbrink, *Catholics in Indonesia: A documented history. Volume 1: A modest recovery 1808-1903* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), p. 36.

³³ W.H. Medhurst, letter, Batavia, Jan. 30, 1832. Cited in *Missionary Herald*, 29 (1833), p. 334.

Testaments were ordered to be kept under impoundment.³⁴ The impoundment remained in effect for 14 years. Brückner only kept 300 copies.³⁵

Medhurst arranged to print a new Javanese tract that Brückner had developed. Brückner was permitted to return to Semarang; however, most of his Javanese New Testaments were kept under impoundment and he had to restart his work under restrictions. He was allowed to conduct evangelistic work in Semarang but had no converts.³⁶ In 1832 the Netherlands East Indies Bible Society requested to print Brückner's Javanese translation of the first five books of the Old Testament at the colonial press in Batavia, but their application was rejected.³⁷

On 12 September 1833, Brückner wrote to Mr Dyer of the BMS about the restrictions to his mission work. Medhurst had helped him print a new tract *On the Holiness of God and the Law* in Batavia. Brückner found the Governor-General's prohibition on distributing Javanese tracts distressing. Even the assistance of Dirk Lenting (1789-1877; in Java 1817, 1823-1835), the minister of the Malay congregation at Batavia, did not reverse the official position. Brückner was told to await news from the Netherlands. He found opposition from the Western colonists on Java to his efforts to 'enlighten' the Javanese, and expressed confidence of the Javanese interest in embracing Christianity, and that the Javanese would be able to distinguish his activities from those of other Westerners in Java.

The voice of the majority, yea, I may say in truth, a few excepted, of the whole mass, of the European population is, "Let the Javanese remain what they are; it does not agree with our politics to enlighten them." They themselves being so deep sunk in carnality and disregard of religion, that they either do not think it worth while, or even dangerous for their own safety, to make any efforts to bring the Javanese to Christ.

You will readily perceive, from this statement, with what powerful foes our cause has to contend here, and we might utterly despair, if we did not know that He whose cause it is, and who is with us, is infinitely stronger than he is who is in the world. The truth of the gospel will and must be victorious even in this benighted land, as it has been victorious in all countries in which it has been promulgated with faith and patient perseverance. The natives, in spite of their prejudices against the Europeans, with whom they closely unite Christianity, become more inquisitive after the truth of the gospel, expressing not seldom the distinction which they make between me and the other Europeans. I have prevailed so far on them, that in every village where I come and am known, I get always a few around me to listen to what I have to say; sometimes I see their

³⁴ Swellengrebel, *In Leijdesckers Voetspoor*, p. 43.

³⁵ Sumartana, *Mission*, p. 14.

³⁶ Cox, *History of the English Baptist Missionary Society*, p. 171.

³⁷ Swellengrebel, *In Leijdesckers Voetspoor*, p. 41.

countenances grow more serious while discoursing to them; a sign that the truth displays its power on their minds.³⁸

Through the intervention of King William I, and with the departure of van Bosch from Java at the end of 1833, the restrictions on Brückner's evangelistic and tract distribution activities were eventually relaxed by 1834, and Medhurst assisted in the printing of his Javanese tracts at the LMS press in Batavia.³⁹ In 1842, Brückner published a Javanese vocabulary at the Batavia press of Medhurst.⁴⁰ However, distribution of his Javanese New Testament remained prohibited until 1846.

In 1842, Brückner visited in East Java Pak Dasimah and a group of Javanese converts who had been converted through reading surreptitious copies of his Javanese tracts and Javanese New Testament. His literary work had unexpectedly resulted in his lifelong goal, the conversion of the Javanese, and eventually in the 1850s he saw the formation of Javanese churches in Central Java.⁴¹

Nevertheless, in the 1840s Brückner still faced criticism because he did not have any baptized converts at his mission station in Semarang in Central Java. Apparently Dutch Mennonites, who had organized the Netherlands Auxiliary of the BMS in 1821, questioned why Brückner did not have any baptized converts. On 8 December 1843, Brückner wrote to Joseph Angus of the BMS a letter defending his missionary work. He could not baptize any Javanese because Baptists and Mennonites were not a recognized denomination in Java:

because the King of Holland says in one of the regulations concerning the churches in Java that none shall be allowed to exist except the Dutch reformed Church, the Lutheran and Roman Catholic. Now a Baptist Church would be against this Regulation. It seems that the Mennonites are not permitted to exist here as a separate communion, because all of them join the Dutch Church; neither has ever come out a Minister of this denomination; whereas this denomination exists separately in Holland and enjoys equal privileges with all other Christian bodies.⁴²

³⁸ *The Baptist Magazine* (1834), p. 219.

³⁹ Walter Henry Medhurst, *China: Its State and Prospects* (London: John Snow, 1838), p. 590.

⁴⁰ Gottlob Brückner, *Een Klein Woordenboek der Hollandsche, Englesche en Javaansche Talen: A Vocabulary of the Dutch, English, and Javanese Languages* (Batavia: London Missionary Press at Parapattan, 1842).

⁴¹ 1842 letter of Gottlob Brückner, published in William Jones, *The jubilee memorial of the Religious Tract Society: containing a record of its Origin, Proceedings, and Results. A.D. 1799 to A.D. 1849.* (London: The Religious Tract Society, 1850), pp. 506-507; also van Akkeren, op. cit.; Oey, 'Gottlob Brückner', pp. 51-56.

⁴² Gottlob Brückner, 8 December 1843 letter to Joseph Angus, cited in A. G. Hoekema, '“een kleine vonk die een groot vuur doet ontbranden” Baptisten als initiators van doopsgezinde zending in de negentiende eeuw.' In Chr.G. F. de Jong, ed., *Een vakkgracht in het Koninkrijk: Kerk- en zendingshistorische opstellen* (Heerenveen: Groen, 2005) p. 128. Courtesy A.G. Hoekema.

As a result the Dutch Mennonites decided to start their own mission in central Java, and a church was established prior to Brückner's death. Two different Dutch Reformed missions also began work in central Java and east Java.⁴³

Conclusion

Gottlob Brückner, an ethnic German who served as an English Baptist missionary in Java from 1816 to 1847, translated the New Testament in Javanese and prepared Javanese tracts, works which were catalysts to the development of Christianity in Java. Two incidents in his career, his conversion to Baptist principles in 1816, and his conflict with Governor-General Johannes van den Bosch, illustrate the challenges he experienced with Western colonial inhabitants and administrators in Java. This study of his career aims to provide an opportunity for European Baptists to reflect on their historical connections with Christians on the island of Java.

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⁴³ A history of Christianity in Java is found in Koenia Atje Soejana, Budi Subanar SJ, Alle G. Hoekema, Raymundus I Made Sudhiarsa SVD, and Karel A. Steenbrink, 'Christianity in Javanese Culture and Society', chapter 14 of Jan Sihar Arintonang and Karel Steenbrink, eds., *A History of Christianity in Indonesia* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 639-730.

Some Hermeneutical Principles as Found in the Theology of Ordination Study Committee's Report of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

Mervi Kalmus

Introduction to Seventh-day Adventism

Seventh-day Adventism as a separate Christian denomination was born in the fertile soil of nineteenth-century North American Protestantism at a time that saw a nation-wide spiritual awakening. Its immediate root was Millerism – the Second Advent movement which dated the second coming of Jesus in the mid-1840s and which message reached a great number of Christians throughout North America from various denominations. A study analyzing the background of Millerite preachers has found that the majority of these preachers were either Methodist, Baptist, Congregational or from Christian Connection.¹ Although a ‘one movement’ that ended in a great disappointment in October 1844, it brought together a group of people with earnest desire to read and understand the Bible and its prophetic texts (especially the book of Daniel). This, in turn, led to the formation of the Seventh-day Adventist church some twenty years later (the denomination was officially registered and acknowledged by the state in 1863). The three founders of the Seventh-day Adventist church, namely Joseph Bates (1792–1872), James White (1821–1881), and Ellen White (1827–1915), had their roots in two of the aforementioned denominations. Joseph Bates and James White were both from Christian Connection, while Ellen White grew up in the Methodist Episcopal Church. Christian Connection carried the idea and the worldview of Restorationism, intending to restore the ideal of the New Testament church and its teachings and rejecting the idea that the Reformation was only something that had happened in the sixteenth century. The Reformation was seen as an ongoing process which could only be completed when all the vestiges of church tradition had been removed and the teachings of the Bible were firmly in place in the church.²

In principle, the Seventh-day Adventist church can trace its origins back to the sixteenth century Reformation, although not so much to the mainstream Reformation initiated and led by Martin Luther, John Calvin,

¹ Everett N. Dick, *William Miller and the Advent Crisis 1831-1844* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1994), pp. 165–169.

² George Knight, *A Search for Identity. The Development of Seventh-Day Adventist Beliefs* (Hagerstown, MA: Review and Herald Publishing, 1999), p. 31.

and Ulrich Zwingli but rather to the Radical Reformation which intended to carry on and complete the unfinished Reformation.³ The main principle of Biblical interpretation which Seventh-day Adventists adopted from the Radical Reformation was that of *Sola Scriptura*. Giving the Bible the central role in the denomination's life has led Seventh-day Adventism away from churchly tradition and creedal formulations and has put the Bible at the centre of the church's practice and teaching. The Bible ought to be the final court of appeal for all doctrine and practice, the Adventists claim.⁴ Thus the Seventh-day Adventist church is a non-creedal denomination.

The other principle which was developed in the early days of Seventh-day Adventism and which has guided the formation of denominational fundamental beliefs, as well as practical life style, is the principle of *Tota Scriptura*. It is based on the belief that the Scripture is one holistic unit and that the Old Testament is equal to the New Testament as a doctrinal and theological authority. The first three chapters of Genesis have received special attention in this regard as the chapters which set the stage for the Biblical metanarrative. The *Tota Scriptura* principle which underlies the theology of Seventh-day Adventism is the root cause of some doctrinal differences between Seventh-day Adventism and other Reformational and Evangelical denominations. Once the Old Testament is seen as an equal partner to the New Testament, some principles and understandings emphasized in the Old Testament can be interpreted as having a universal nature; for example, the universality of the seventh-day Sabbath and the holistic (non-dual) nature of human beings. In the true Restorationist spirit, the Adventists have seen these as principles that need to be restored in the church.

A denominational historian, George Knight, has suggested that Restorationism and Methodism are the main roots of Seventh-day Adventism, but he also mentions Anabaptism, Puritanism, and Deism as sources from which Seventh-day Adventist theology has drawn its teachings or by which Seventh-day Adventists have been influenced. The combination of the historical movements upon which it relies and the main hermeneutical principles from which it draws its Scriptural belief system makes Seventh-day Adventism a unique denomination as we know it today.

³ Knight, *A Search for Identity*, pp. 30–31.

⁴ Aleksandar S. Santrac, 'The *Sola Scriptura* Principle in the Current Debate', *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, 24.1 (2013), 107–126 (p. 107).

Background to the Hermeneutical Problem

The History of Ordination Debate

Just as each denomination faces different theological and ecclesiastical challenges at different times, so does the Seventh-day Adventist church. Throughout its history, the question of ordaining women into pastoral ministry has risen every now and then, in different places and with varying degrees of intensity. During the church's first fifty years of existence the question was somewhat in the background, as one of its founders and 'probably the most influential minister ever to serve the Adventist church',⁵ Mrs Ellen White was alive, playing a prominent role in the denomination's life. In addition to this, it is noteworthy that the Methodist as well as the Christian Connection denomination nurtured a very positive and open attitude toward women and their active ministry in the church, an attitude which transferred to early Seventh-day Adventism through its founders.⁶

The modern discussion on the topic could be said to have started at the end of the 1960s, when some of the geographical units of the church made a request for ordaining women ministers on the same terms as their male colleagues. The Seventh-day Adventist church as a strongly structured world-wide church does not allow for local churches to adopt their own practices, thus a global decision was needed. The request was never given an official answer, but in 1975 the General Conference annual meeting gave permission to ordain women as deaconesses and elders (but not as pastors) in a local church.⁷ This decision started a decades-long discussion on the topic at every administrative level of the church. It was clear that two diametrically opposite interpretations and statements were beginning to take shape both among the denomination's theologians as well as church members. In 1990 the General Conference session⁸ voted against the equal pastoral ordination of men and women.⁹ Although the issue had been voted upon, the topic was not settled.

The Theology of Ordination Study Committee

In 2010, during yet another General Conference session, a new request was made to study the theology and practice of pastoral ordination, especially in

⁵ George Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-Day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MA: Review and Herald Publishing, 1999), p. 60.

⁶ Jan Barna, *Ordination of Women in Seventh-Day Adventist Theology, A Study in Biblical Interpretations* (Belgrade: Preporod, 2012), p. 14.

⁷ Barna, *Ordination of Women*, pp. 32–33.

⁸ General Conference is a session which takes place every five years, where important decisions (both administrative and theological) are reached and which always includes delegates from every administrative unit of the church.

⁹ Barna, *Ordination of Women*, p. 35.

connection with the issue of women's ordination. The request resulted in the establishment of the Theology of Ordination Study Committee (hereafter TOSC), which was composed of 106 Adventist theologians and laity with the task of conducting a thorough study and presenting a proposal on the matter to the next General Conference held in the summer of 2015.¹⁰ In 2014 the TOSC presented the results of their four year research in which they admitted the difference of opinions. Three different viewpoints on the issue remained. The first one concluded that ordaining women to pastoral ministry equally with their male colleagues is in harmony with the Bible's guidelines for church leadership. The second position stated that the gender requirements for church leaders in the early church were not temporal and thus, following the Scriptural example, only men can be ordained as pastors. The third position confirmed the historical tradition of male leadership, at the same time acknowledging the possibility of deviating from the rule when circumstances require it.¹¹ No consensus was reached within the committee.

The Hermeneutical Problem

This is a classic example of a debate about Biblical matters which divides religious communities, where both sides confess their faith in the Bible as the source of their knowledge and practice. When reaching strikingly different conclusions, it becomes obvious that very different ways of approaching the Biblical text and interpreting it have been at work. Underlying the shared idea of the sole authority of the Scriptures, there have been a vast number of pre-understandings, presuppositions, and different perspectives which have transmitted the original formulation of the Biblical text into a present belief and which have brought about the division on a given issue.¹² With a division so stark, it is essential to acknowledge the crucial role of the interpreters and their contribution to the discussion, since the text alone cannot be the source of such a division or contradiction. The life of the text is closely connected to that of its interpreters.¹³ They are the readers/interpreters whose belief systems and pre-understandings need to be examined in order to find an explanation – or at least to begin to do so – for the existence of diametrically opposite viewpoints.

This article aims to briefly analyze the hermeneutical background and

¹⁰ More precise information about the Theology of Ordination Study Committee and its publications from 2010 until 2015 can be found on the webpage of the Office of Archives, Statistics and Research of the Seventh Day Adventist Church. <https://www.adventistarchives.org/about-tosc> [accessed 3 December 2015].

¹¹ 'General Conference Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report', *Adventist Archives* <https://www.adventistarchives.org/final-tosc-report.pdf> [accessed 21 September 2015].

¹² Gerhard F. Hasel, 'General Principles of Interpretation', in *A Symposium on Biblical Hermeneutics* (Washington: The Review and Herald Press, 1974), pp. 163–93 (p. 170).

¹³ Robert Morgan and John Barton, *Biblical Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 269.

reasoning behind one part of the TOSC study. It does not concentrate so much on the final statements themselves but rather on the hermeneutical principles and different processes of drawing conclusions. These are the underlying currencies which knowingly or unknowingly guide the reasoning and thus the conclusions. Due to the limited scope of this study, not the whole of the TOSC report is under examination; I have decided to concentrate only on the hermeneutics of the 'No' statement which supports the ordination of men – but not of women – to pastoral ministry. It is a fascinating document as it presents and concisely summarizes the hermeneutics of a vast number of church members in the Seventh-day Adventist church, and as such it is worth in-depth study far beyond the scope of the current article.

As to the author's personal perspective, two things ought to be said. First, serving the Seventh-day Adventist church as a non-ordained pastor, the topic bears a personal significance for me. I have followed the discussion with increasing and critical interest as the decisions of the world church have a very practical and personal application to my own ministry. But, second and more importantly, the ordination discussion has clearly shown the need for detailed study of hermeneutical principles within the theological leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist church at large. Both the opponents and the proponents have used arguments in the debate which cannot be considered hermeneutically sound. The current article attempts to bring to attention some of the aspects one needs to consider when engaged in a doctrinal debate. But the debate is by no means restricted to the Seventh-day Adventist church. As there are other denominations struggling with similar issues, it is important to hear different voices, to see the development of viewpoints, and to engage in a thoroughgoing hermeneutical analysis cross-denominationally.

Adventist Hermeneutics

Adventist hermeneutics, given the denomination's historical and theological roots, by and large belongs to the pietistic evangelical hermeneutical tradition.¹⁴ It is an approach which is predominantly text-focused and which results in a set of principles of interpretation around the text, even to the point of reducing the hermeneutics to exegesis. It is based on the idea that the 'proper hermeneutics provides the conceptual framework for interpreting correctly by means of accurate exegesis'.¹⁵ In the later analysis one can see how accurate a description it is and how closely hermeneutics and exegesis are connected in the TOSC report. Such a text-based approach is closely tied

¹⁴ Barna, *Ordination of Women*, p. 272.

¹⁵ William Klein, Craig Blomberg and Robert Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1993), p. 20.

to the idea of intentionalism, which states that the reader can attempt to find out the author's intentions and correct meaning of the text.¹⁶ Thus the exegetical work will result in the finding out of the fixed and unchanging meaning which the text contains.¹⁷ The TOSC report is very optimistic about the possibility of finding the right or true meaning of the Biblical texts which are under investigation.

The strong emphasis on the text inevitably results in the lack of a deeper analysis of the reader's position and the reader's role in the hermeneutical process. The reader can even be approached with some suspicion as someone who is changeable or impressionable in the world of fixed meanings. The text-centredness is seen as the safe way of avoiding uncertainty. Although implicitly, statements like 'Some within our ranks again feel pressure to be in step with the surrounding culture'¹⁸ point to readers as the subjective element in the equation that ought to be objective and even scientific.

Although this article only concentrates on the principles of the opponents of equal ordination and leaves out the position of the proponents, one remark about their difference in approaching the topic should be made. Those people who advocate the Biblical nature of equal ordination make a careful and clear distinction between two steps of the hermeneutical application process: on the one hand there is historical, cultural, and linguistic exegesis which concerns itself with the world of the author; on the other hand there is the open-ended application for the present day reader where various changes – generational, semantic, and cultural – need to be taken into account.¹⁹ The opponents are much more prone to one step process, meaning that the original meaning of the text tends to immediately connect or overlap with its application at any given moment, regardless of time or place.²⁰

With these general principles in mind, we now proceed to examine the TOSC report in more detail.

The Principles of Interpretation

In the 'Principles of Biblical Interpretation' section of the Position Summary No. 1²¹ in the TOSC report, three principles have been described as the basis

¹⁶ E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), p. 8.

¹⁷ Barna, *Ordination of Women*, p. 273.

¹⁸ 'Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report', p. 29.

¹⁹ Guy Fritz, *Thinking Theologically* (Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 1999), p. 65.

²⁰ Barna, *Ordination of Women*, p. 273.

²¹ Position No. 1 is the summary of the viewpoint which does not see the ordination of women to pastoral ministry as applicable.

of reaching conclusions in Biblical matters. Although brief, they very expressively characterize the viewpoint which, in a nutshell, can be identified as a conservative, even a fundamentalist position. Such a position does not characterize the Seventh-day Adventist church alone but is one of the most widespread modes of reading the Bible among traditional Christian communities worldwide today.²² This mode is concerned with and takes very seriously the literal meaning and application of the Biblical text in the life of a religious community. It could be called a pious reading of the Bible. The principles which emerge from such a position and which underline the interpretative acts are as follows:

- ‘The Bible and the Bible only’ (Sola Scriptura) principle. ‘On the interpretation of Scripture we are in harmony with the Protestant Reformers, who regarded the Bible as the final authority for doctrine and practice.’²³
- The accessibility principle, which states that the Bible was not written to be understood only by a religious elite but it was written for everyone. ‘The priesthood of all believers that Peter notes implies full access to the Bible by all believers and a Spirit-guided ability to understand it.’²⁴
- The plain reading principle, which states that the language of the Bible should mainly be explained according to its literal meaning (unless a symbol or figurative speech is employed).²⁵

The Sola Scriptura Principle

Since the Seventh-day Adventist church is a child of the Radical Reformation, it is no surprise that the Sola Scriptura principle has taken the most prominent position in the TOSC document. In this, the Seventh-day Adventist church is in line with other Christian denominations who hold high the conservative view of the Scripture and its authority. Seeing the scriptural text as the sole source of revelation and the authoritative norm of practice,²⁶ along with the idea that the authority of the Biblical text cannot be derived from any external criteria,²⁷ is deeply embedded in the mindset of the TOSC authors. It is from the scriptural foundation that the higher levels of doctrine and theology can be derived, not the other way around, ‘never from doctrine

²² R. P. Carroll, ‘The Reader and the Text’, in *Text in Context. Essays by the Members of Society for Old Testament Study*, ed. by A. D. H. Mayes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 20.

²³ ‘Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report’, p. 31.

²⁴ ‘Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report’, p. 31.

²⁵ ‘Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report’, p. 31.

²⁶ Keith Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura* (Idaho: Canon, 2001), p. 299.

²⁷ *The Bible: Its Authority and Interpretation in the Ecumenical Movement. Faith and Order Paper No. 99*, ed. by Ellen Flesseman van Leer (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1980), p. 53.

to the truth or meaning of the text'.²⁸ But although a noble principle, it has a number of underlying presuppositions and dangers which one needs to be aware of when using it as a tool for doctrinal formation. Attitudinal, ideological and methodological pre-understandings are always present when dealing with interpretation²⁹ and some of them can be pointed out here. Sadly, none of them have been mentioned in the TOSC report.

When operating within the premise of *Sola Scriptura*, there is a need to specify the relationships between the different parts of Scripture and their textual functions, to acknowledge the different genres and purposes of the text. The *Sola Scriptura* principle does not mean the different parts of the Old and New Testament can or should be handled and approached in the same way.³⁰ Sadly there is no acknowledgement of this in the TOSC paper; passages from Genesis 1 and 2 are analyzed alongside those from 1 Timothy 3 and Galatians 3, with no reference to differences in genres or styles, nor to the huge gap between the times of writing.³¹ Such an approach does not do justice to the Biblical text and its development over the course of history. *Tota Scriptura* as a principle, although acknowledging the continuous development of religious thought over a long period of time, does not mean one can neglect the understanding that different genres and different texts have been produced with different purposes.

Second, it is not enough to bear in mind the literary differences; in addition historical and social context is needed in order to determine the relationship between different passages. As it is true that in many conservative Christian movements the Bible is cited out of context, it is also true in this particular case. The lack of detailed description of historical context (that is, what is not expressed verbally in the text) can be seen as characteristic of an underlying principle of verbal inspiration. Although not supported explicitly, the consistent neglect of a wider social and historical context refers to the idea that one should not pay attention to extra-textual features, since they are not expressed verbally in the text and thus are of secondary importance.³² Taking these things into consideration can be seen as a threat to the *Sola Scriptura* principle and can lead to a degrading practice of 'reinterpreting Scripture in harmony with modern cultural preferences'.³³ It is a necessary area of further research, as the Seventh-day Adventist church – although never officially – has leaned throughout its history towards the

²⁸ Nancey Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism. How Modern and Postmodern Philosophy Set the Theological Agenda* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), p. 17.

²⁹ Duncan Ferguson, *Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (London: SCM Press, 1987), p. 13.

³⁰ Werner Jeanrond, *Text and Interpretation as Categories of Theological Thinking* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988), p. 101.

³¹ 'Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report', pp. 33–42.

³² Alexander Priloutskii, 'The Authority, Inspiration and Power of the Bible', *Witnessing to God's Faithfulness. Issues of Biblical Authority*, The Lutheran World Federation Studies, 2006, 35–44 (p. 37).

³³ 'Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report', p. 30.

verbal inspiration theory (especially during the long period of the 1920s–1950s)³⁴ and it is obvious that on a deep level it affects the hermeneutical process and thus the doctrinal formation of the denomination. The underlying principle is that, as the Scripture provides an indubitable foundation for theological construction, its teaching is thus free of error, unless theologians cannot distinguish between the essential teaching of the Bible and incidental cultural assumptions, as the TOSC document seems to suggest. Nancey Murphy identifies such a view as a feature of fundamentalist evangelical theology.³⁵

The third area of critique has to do with the selection of Biblical passages as the formation of the basis of a doctrinal understanding. The choice of Biblical texts in the TOSC document refers to the fact that the hermeneutical method used can be described largely as a proof-text method. In the TOSC report the New Testament texts analyzed are: 1 Timothy 2 and 3, 1 Corinthians 11, and Galatians 3. The only Old Testament passages analyzed, which provide a wider context and mention the grander Biblical metanarrative, are Genesis 1–3. The proof-text method is a method which is often used to address some contemporary issue or practice and where the interpreter goes to search for scriptural texts that support the topical or pastoral position.³⁶ This is a method with several weaknesses, as the Biblical passages are extracted from their original context and in this way the author may place meaning into the text rather than draw meaning out of it.³⁷ When the historical, social, and linguistic contexts of the text are neglected (as they seem to be in this case), it is rather easy for an interpreter to identify what he/she has drawn from the Bible directly with the teaching of the Bible, and thus to forget the hermeneutical spiral where one has the demanding task of carefully moving from the textual meaning to the contextual meaning (that is, the application).³⁸

Thus the Sola Scriptura principle needs to be approached with care and with understanding about the underlying principles.

The Accessibility Principle

The second principle could be called an accessibility principle, as it states that the Bible has been written to and can be understood by everyone, not

³⁴ Knight, *A Search for Identity*, p. 28.

³⁵ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, p. 17.

³⁶ Walter Kaiser Jr. and Moises Silva, *Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics: The Search for Meaning*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 33.

³⁷ Manfred Oeming, *Contemporary Biblical Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Vermont: Ashgate, 2006), p. 75.

³⁸ Grant Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral. A Comprehensive Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1991), p. 14.

just a religious elite who have received special training in dealing with the Biblical text. Although not explicitly, the accessibility principle acknowledges and underlines the communal nature of any Biblical hermeneutics. The role of the community is crucial and this principle is not in any way at variance with the Sola Scriptura principle. As Alister McGrath points out, Sola Scriptura has never meant putting private judgement above corporal judgement or degenerating into some form of individualism.³⁹ On the contrary, ‘the priesthood of all believers’ recognizes the need for communal interpretation as a basis for hermeneutical process.

The TOSC report acknowledges the corporate nature of interpretation, but at the same time it fails to see the other side of the coin, which is the inevitable plurality of these interpreting communities, and thus the plurality of viewpoints and reading strategies. (There is only one reference to the nature of the community, describing it as the community of ‘common people’.)⁴⁰ It is crucial to recognize the fact that every interpretive community is shaped and influenced by various factors, for example, the use of human reason, different experiences, particular traditions, and others.⁴¹ So there cannot be a unitary way of reading the Bible, as the receiving communities are vastly different.⁴² To fail to identify and specify the group with its pre-understandings and dogmatic views, to fail to place the given debate into the larger framework of historical interpretive tradition is to be unaware of and thus unprotected from one’s own blind spots. No theology is done in a vacuum; no religious community exists in a vacuum. There is a need to assess critically one’s position and relation to other communities and interpretations past and present. A critical self-awareness is crucial to theological thinking.

The Plain Reading Principle

The third interpretive principle mentioned in the TOSC report is that of ‘plain reading’, which implicitly touches on two important topics: that of the meaning of the Biblical text and that of the role of a reader. The brief mention of the preferred but ambiguous method of plain reading does not do justice to the complexity of the issue, as the methodology should be analyzed in much more detail, but it does open a door for an important question about the relationship between the text and its reader/interpreter. Any hermeneutical analysis which lays claims to doctrinal authority has to study carefully the principles behind determining the possible meanings of the

³⁹ Alister McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), p. 102.

⁴⁰ ‘Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report’, p. 31.

⁴¹ John Peckham, ‘Sola Scriptura: Reductio Ad Absurdum?’, *Trinity Journal*, 35 (2014), 195–223 (p. 202).

⁴² Carroll, *The Reader and the Text*, p. 8.

authoritative text and it also has to give appropriate attention to the role and the task of a reader, which, as has been mentioned earlier, has not received necessary attention in Adventist hermeneutics in general.

The Meaning of the Text

Of the three hermeneutical principles listed and followed in the TOSC document, plain reading is the most problematic, but at the same time it characterizes and represents distinctly the conservative approach to the Biblical text. It seems to assume either the possibility of context-free reading or a reading so conventional that the process of detecting the meaning of the text on the synchronic or diachronic level is regarded as unnecessary. It is a misunderstanding shared by many fundamentalist Christian communities. To avoid it, there are two dimensions of meaning that need to be considered and studied: on the one hand the semantic and lexical dimension, the ‘meaning of’, and on the other hand the hermeneutical meaning in the context of the reader-text relationship, the ‘meaning for’. In this way the principle ‘all meaning is contextual meaning’⁴³ would be recognized and used in the actual textual analysis. On a more positive note, the plain reading approach acknowledges the communal nature of the act of interpreting. Plain reading strategy (or any other reading strategy, for that matter) by its nature demands an agreement in interpretation within a certain group of people, and the judgement about alternative reading strategies as being in or out of accord with the accepted strategy.⁴⁴

When it comes to the lexical and semantic dimension of the TOSC report on a practical level, one aspect of the meaning of the text which catches one’s attention is the understanding of the use and the meaning of specific words – more precisely, the gendered words – in the Biblical text. In the exegetical section there are references to original languages and lexical expressions about men and women which lead to the conclusion that in the passages dealing with genders the ‘use of gender-specific terms is deliberate’.⁴⁵ This idea correlates well with Murphy’s understanding of the propositional theories of language in conservative theology: the language has cognitive, referential and factual nature. The religious language as expressed in the Biblical text is seen as sacred; not only are the thoughts inspired, but also the divine influence extends to the specific expressions.⁴⁶ The words themselves carry inspiration which is beyond errancy.

⁴³ Elizabeth Malbon, ‘Structuralism, Hermeneutics, and Contextual Meaning’, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 51 (1983), 207–30 (p. 222).

⁴⁴ Mark Allan Powell, *What Is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), p. 17.

⁴⁵ ‘Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report’, p. 33.

⁴⁶ Murphy, *Beyond Liberalism and Fundamentalism*, p. 43.

The Reader

The clarity of the Biblical text in connection with a reader is a very important hermeneutical topic. The modern hermeneutical discourse has placed an increasing emphasis on the reception of the text and on the reader. With reception being introduced to the field of Biblical interpretation, the historical-critical, text-oriented picture has been challenged over the past decades and the reader with her/his experiences and viewpoints has become increasingly important.⁴⁷ The emphasis on the receiver in the classical hermeneutical triangle of the author–text–receiver has led to the rise of reader-response criticism. Reader-response criticism speaks of the crucial interaction between the imagery world of the author and the reader: the expectations with which the reader approaches the text, the social conventions of the environment of the reader, and the decisions the reader makes about the author's meaning.⁴⁸ This is not to say that the reader's response to the text *is* the meaning, as those at the more radical end of the reader-response spectrum have occasionally claimed.⁴⁹ However, it does mean that a thorough analysis of the interpreter's position and understandings is needed. This would be a difficult task for any interpreting community, even more so for a group of conservative Christians who view with suspicion the idea that the reader 'completes' the meaning of the text, or at least actively contributes something to the text, including the Biblical text.

When reading the section of the TOSC document which has been under examination in this article, one has to admit it is difficult to say anything fundamental about its approach to the reader, as this topic has been treated only in passing. The role of the reader is acknowledged, but more as a threat to the unchangeable meaning of the text: 'We must speak meaningfully to the culture around us, but should this lead us to disregard biblical principles and the clear teaching of Scripture on the leadership of the church?'⁵⁰ In this way, the TOSC report stays within the framework of intentionalism and text-centredness.

⁴⁷ Yolanda Dreyer, 'Sola Scriptura: Hindrance or Catalyst for Church Unity?', *Hervormde Teologiese Studies*, 69 (2013), 1–8 (p. 2).

⁴⁸ Anthony Thiselton, *Hermeneutics. An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), pp. 309–310.

⁴⁹ Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 3.

⁵⁰ 'Theology of Ordination Study Committee Report', p. 29.

Conclusion

In this article no in-depth hermeneutical analysis was attempted or carried out. The scope of the study was too limited for that. Rather, this article aimed at giving the background to the current ordination debate in the Seventh-day Adventist church and concentrated solely on pointing out the hermeneutical possibilities and responsibilities one faces when tackling the task of interpreting Biblical passages in order to formulate a coherent doctrine on a practical matter. There are many principles and different viewpoints in the field of contemporary hermeneutics one can benefit from when conducting a doctrinal study, and this paper has pointed out some of them. The TOSC document on the matter of women in ministry was used as a representational case study of a conservative understanding of a doctrine.

Three principles were mentioned and summarized in the TOSC study: the Sola Scriptura principle, the accessibility principle, and the plain reading principle. The first deals with the authority of the Scripture; in this area both the idea of inerrancy as well as proof-texting as a method need to be examined. The accessibility principle calls for an understanding concerning the corporate nature of interpretation. And the plain reading principle points toward two prominent topics in the discipline of hermeneutics: the process of determining the meaning of the text and the role of the reader/interpreter as an organic part of hermeneutical process. So, although at first sight all three principles seem to be rather straightforward and foundational, in reality there are many aspects behind them that require serious analysis. Such in-depth analysis would be the first step on a long journey towards building a solid hermeneutical foundation for the ongoing debate about ordination in the Seventh-day Adventist church. Such study is urgently needed, as the hermeneutics and the understanding of the role of language are crucial for doctrinal development and contemporary scholarly studies. I agree wholeheartedly with Millard Erickson who has pointed out that ‘the issue of contemporising the Biblical message is possibly the single most important issue facing evangelical hermeneutics today’.⁵¹ It is true for the Seventh-day Adventists as the church struggles with finding a way to bring the Biblical message to contemporary society and doctrinal formation in a meaningful and hermeneutically sound way.

One way of moving forward with this specific hermeneutical study is to take into consideration the wider philosophical streams which deal with the role of religious language and Biblical inerrancy. To locate oneself on the liberalism-fundamentalism spectrum and to analyze one’s (pre-) understandings would not be easy, but it would help the church to build its

⁵¹ Millard Erickson, *Evangelical Interpretation: Perspectives on Hermeneutical Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), p. 56.

doctrines on a more stable foundation. In this article only a handful of references were made to this spectrum as analyzed by Nancey Murphy, but it is certainly an important aspect when further studies are undertaken.

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Applying the Jubilee to Contemporary Socio-Economic and Environmental Issues

David Lazonby

Introduction

This paper will apply Leviticus 25 to the contemporary socio-political and environmental issues of over-farming, climate change, international debt, modern-day slavery, land expropriation, and wealth accumulation, aiming to make concrete social proposals. Whilst such application of Israelite civil law is often regarded as illegitimate,¹ with ethical application limited to the church as the new people of God,² Wright observes that it is unreasonable to ‘confine the relevance of Old Testament socio-economic ethics’³ in this way, since God remains concerned with public issues such as justice and peace.⁴ Although MacIntyre may be right that incompatible conceptions of justice make moral consensus impossible,⁵ his conclusion that morality can only survive in local forms of community seems overly pessimistic. Stassen and Gushee contend that we ought not to ‘emigrate inwardly into small enclaves of self-fulfilment’⁶ and that applying morality to public life and power structures is vital.⁷ Whilst complete moral consensus may be unachievable, Christians can contribute to these debates and this paper seeks to apply Leviticus 25 to these contemporary issues as part of just such a contribution.

Such application is challenging, given the huge historical and cultural gap between the tribal, agrarian world of ancient Israel⁸ and contemporary globalized society. In order to achieve this application, Israel will be viewed as a paradigm, embodying principles for socio-economic ethics in a particular culture:⁹

¹ Philip Jenson, *How to Interpret the Old Testament Law* (Grove Booklets 58; Cambridge: Grove Books, 2010), p. 4.

² Christopher J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), pp. 112-113.

³ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 114.

⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *A Pathway of Interpretation: The Old Testament for Pastors and Students* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), p. 19.

⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 3rd edn. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 252.

⁶ Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), p. 76.

⁷ Stassen and Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics*, p. 76.

⁸ Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Nottingham: IVP, 2004), p. 63.

⁹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land: Family, Land and Property in the Old Testament* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1997), p. xviii.

By seeing how *they* addressed, within *their* cultural and historical context, problems and issues common to humanity... we are helped to address (if not always to solve) the ethical challenges *we* face in our different contexts.¹⁰(italics added)

Careful attention will therefore be paid to the specificity of the text and points of connection will be sought with contemporary issues. Nevertheless, given the radically different context, this will not simply be a case of logical application and some imaginative leaps will be necessary to make relevant suggestions for today.¹¹ The intention throughout will be to undertake the task suggested by Brueggemann: to pay ‘attention to the specificity of the text...informed by sound critical study...’¹² whilst ‘responding to scripture as though it is a live revelatory voice that illumines our present and generates futures for us’.¹³

The first part of this paper identifies indebtedness, land-loss, land preservation and wealth accumulation as key societal issues in the Ancient Near East and examines how Israel’s faith led to the distinctive approach to these issues embodied in Leviticus 25. The second part of the paper explains why over-farming, climate change, international debt, modern-day slavery, land expropriation and wealth accumulation are deemed to have sufficient parallels with these ancient issues and seeks to address these matters in ways which faithfully embody the Jubilee principles.

Identifying Societal Issues

Dating the Legislation

To identify the societal issues addressed by Leviticus 25 it is necessary to consider the dating of the legislation, so that the appropriate historical context can be ascertained. Leviticus 25 belongs to the Holiness Code,¹⁴ which is generally regarded as exilic or post-exilic.¹⁵ However, this gives a date for the compilation of earlier material,¹⁶ and, whilst extra material may have been inserted by redactors,¹⁷ the age of the Jubilee legislation must be

¹⁰ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 69.

¹¹ Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus, Liberation and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1985), p. 91.

¹² Maria Harris, *Proclaim Jubilee! A Spirituality for the Twenty-First Century* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), p. ix.

¹³ Harris, p. ix.

¹⁴ Leviticus 17-26.

¹⁵ Walter Brueggemann, David L. Petersen, Terence E. Fretheim et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd edn. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), p. 132.

¹⁶ Philip J. Budd, *Leviticus* (The New Century Bible Commentary; London: Marshall Pickering, 1996), p. 12.

¹⁷ Jonathan Ben-Dov, ‘The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation’, *Dead Sea Discoveries* 16/1 (2009), 119-21 (p. 121).

ascertained independently.¹⁸ The complexity of the Jubilee institutions is often thought to require a late dating to account for their development.¹⁹ Moreover, the lack of evidence for Jubilee observance has led to the suggestion of a later composition.²⁰ However, the failure to observe the law may simply reflect neglect and the self-interest of the powerful,²¹ whilst Near Eastern antecedents of the Jubilee practices mean that the legislation, whilst distinctive, fits a pre-exilic context.²² Moreover, the tribal and rural emphasis of the legislation suggests an early date.²³ For these reasons, Wright's conclusion that 'it makes sense to see the Jubilee as a very ancient law that fell into neglect'²⁴ seems reasonable.

Royal Decrees

Having established the historical context of the Jubilee legislation as the ancient Near East, it is now possible to examine the royal decrees of 'release',²⁵ land legislation²⁶ and fallow year practices,²⁷ which indicate some of the common societal issues faced in that context. Various ancient Near Eastern legal documents refer to royal decrees of 'release': the law codes of Lipit-Istar, the court records of Hammurabi²⁸ and the inscriptions of Entemena.²⁹ These decrees involved the release of slaves, cancellation of debts and recovery of land.³⁰ Such decrees were occasional, voluntary acts of kings³¹ apparently motivated by political expediency, often pronounced at the accession of a new king to demonstrate generosity and engender support.³² These decrees were limited to particular loyal subjects³³ and

¹⁸ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 58.

¹⁹ Dorothy Irvin, 'Leviticus' in *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary: An Indispensable Resource for All Who Want to View Scripture Through Different Eyes*, Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans (eds.) (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), pp. 50-87.

²⁰ Konrad Raiser, 'Utopia and Responsibility' in *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Hans Ucko (ed.) (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), pp. 15-27 (p. 22).

²¹ Christopher J.H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Nottingham: IVP, 2006), pp. 295-96.

²² Lee W. Casperson, 'Sabbatical, Jubilee and the Temple of Solomon', *Versus Testamentum* 53/3 (2003), pp. 283-96 (p. 286).

²³ Ben-Dov, p. 119.

²⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, pp. 295-96.

²⁵ Ringe, pp. 16-17.

²⁶ Jeffrey A. Fager, *Land Tenure and the Biblical Jubilee: Uncovering Hebrew Ethics through the Sociology of Knowledge*, JSOT Supplements, Vol. 155 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1993), p. 26.

²⁷ John Sietza Bergsma, *The Jubilee from Leviticus to Qumran: A History of Interpretation* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2007), p. 33.

²⁸ Ringe, pp. 23-24.

²⁹ Bergsma, p. 22.

³⁰ Fager, p. 25.

³¹ Timothy M. Willis, *Leviticus* (Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009), p. 212.

³² Ringe, pp. 23-24.

³³ Willis, p. 212.

functioned as a way of rewarding certain groups within the populace and enhancing the security of the king's reign. Despite the ulterior motives which may have been behind these laws, and despite their limited application, they do indicate that slavery, indebtedness and land-loss were issues in these ancient societies.

Inalienability of land was common throughout the Near East,³⁴ with purchasers able to buy the produce of land for a number of years, but with the legal title retained by the original family.³⁵ Likewise the practice of redemption, whereby a family could buy back the right to the produce of their land, also existed.³⁶ However, whilst such protection existed for landowning families, the majority of the population were peasants.³⁷ The legislation did not prevent the emergence of landless peasants³⁸ but presumed their existence and entrenched the privileges of the elite landowners, ensuring that their land would remain within their families. Nevertheless, despite such failings, these laws indicate the importance of land in these agrarian societies³⁹ and highlight the issue of land-loss.

Although there is no evidence of legislation requiring the observance of fallow years, references are made to fallow periods and to the right of owners to any produce during such times.⁴⁰ The indication is that, through experience, farmers were aware of the importance of fallow periods for preventing the exhaustion of nutrients and the build-up of excess salt.⁴¹ These practices indicate the vital importance of land as a productive resource and address the issue of preserving the fertility of the land.

The practices outlined above indicate some common societal problems in the Ancient Near East. The problems of indebtedness, slavery and land-loss are evidenced by the intermittent royal decrees. The importance of land as the basic productive resource for survival and the concern of providing for future generations are demonstrated by the restrictions on selling land outside the family, the provision for the redemption of land, and the fallow practices. These key issues of indebtedness, landlessness and land preservation seem to have been common across the region and form the historical background for Israel's legislation.

³⁴ Bergsma, p. 33.

³⁵ Fager, p. 26.

³⁶ Bergsma, p. 34.

³⁷ Wright, pp. 55-56.

³⁸ C. René Padilla, 'The Relevance of the Jubilee in Today's World: (Leviticus 25)', *Mission Studies* 13/1 (1996), pp. 12-31 (p. 18).

³⁹ Fager, p. 26.

⁴⁰ Bergsma, p. 33.

⁴¹ John H. Walton and Victor H. Matthews, *Genesis-Deuteronomy*, (The IVP Bible Background Commentary; Downers Grove: IVP, 1997), p. 118.

Religious Background

As well as the historical background of the legislation, there is also a religious background. Israel's faith has four key themes with particular relevance for their distinctive approaches to these societal issues: their theology of creation, their concept of Sabbath, their 'foundational story'⁴² of exodus, and their history of land division. Each of these themes will be considered now to discern their significance for the Jubilee legislation.

Creation

Israel believed in a God who was not limited to a particular territory,⁴³ but who created all things and to whom the whole world belonged.⁴⁴ Moreover, Israel affirmed the goodness of creation, evidenced by the repetition within the creation account.⁴⁵ This goodness existed prior to the creation of humanity and therefore creation has intrinsic value rather than being merely of instrumental value for humanity.⁴⁶

Israel also recognized humankind as belonging to creation, whilst having a special role within it. Adam is formed from the 'dust of the ground'⁴⁷ and is therefore an 'earth-creature.'⁴⁸ However, humanity, both male and female, are created in the image of God and assigned the role of having dominion over the earth.⁴⁹ Whilst this has sometimes been used to justify exploitation, such dominion in the image of God would clearly 'entail benevolent care for the rest of creation'.⁵⁰ Thus, Israel's theology of creation affirms the intrinsic value of both people and wider creation and calls people to care for creation just as God would.

Sabbath

The creation account also refers to God resting on the seventh day,⁵¹ something which is drawn upon in the Sabbath commandment⁵² and which characterizes God as one who rests⁵³ and who offers rest to all, challenging

⁴² Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 27.

⁴³ Brueggemann et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 68.

⁴⁴ Psalm 24.1 (NRSV).

⁴⁵ Genesis 1.3, 10, 12, 17, 21, 25, 31.

⁴⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 107.

⁴⁷ Genesis 2.7 (NRSV).

⁴⁸ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 118.

⁴⁹ Genesis 1.27-28 (NRSV).

⁵⁰ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 120.

⁵¹ Genesis 2.2-3.

⁵² Exodus 20.11.

⁵³ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), p. 2.

a restless emphasis on continuous production in an agricultural setting.⁵⁴ The Sabbath reminded Israel both of their covenant relationship⁵⁵ and of God's timetable.⁵⁶ Through it God both gave the people rest⁵⁷ and called them to set aside time as holy.⁵⁸ Observing the Sabbath required dependence upon God's provision⁵⁹ as people rested from production and set aside time for God.

Exodus

The exodus revealed God as an active liberator who brought freedom to people.⁶⁰ It highlighted God's concern for the vulnerable⁶¹ and the significance of economic oppression to God.⁶² Since Israel was to reflect the character of God,⁶³ their social existence should hence demonstrate such concern for the vulnerable, especially those suffering from economic oppression, and should involve means of active liberation.

Furthermore, the exodus established the identity of Israel as redeemed slaves.⁶⁴ This has significance for their society, since those who knew themselves as redeemed slaves cannot regard slaves as subhuman and those who had experienced liberation themselves ought to provide for the liberation of others.

Land Division

Willis notes that 'the culminating act of the exodus was the giving of this land to Israel as a home'.⁶⁵ Whilst the whole earth still belonged to God⁶⁶ he generously gave them land as their home, to live in and to care for. Joshua 13-19 and Numbers 34-36 describe the land division between tribal groups, carefully noting the equity of these divisions.⁶⁷ This meant that Israelites

⁵⁴ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, p. 36.

⁵⁵ Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1974), p. 416.

⁵⁶ Harold H.P. Dressler, 'The Sabbath in the Old Testament', in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, D.A. Carson (ed.) (Eugene, OR: Zondervan, 1982), pp. 21-42 (p. 26).

⁵⁷ Childs, p. 290.

⁵⁸ Childs, p. 416.

⁵⁹ Norman Wirzba, *Living the Sabbath: Discovering the Rhythms of Rest and Delight* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), p. 38.

⁶⁰ Ringe, p. 7.

⁶¹ Wright, p. 38.

⁶² Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 156.

⁶³ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 25.

⁶⁴ E.g. Psalm 106.10.

⁶⁵ Willis, p. 216.

⁶⁶ Psalm 24.1.

⁶⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd edn. (Overtures to Biblical Theology; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p. 192.

could affirm not simply that the land as a whole was a gift but that individual portions belonged to particular extended families.⁶⁸ This implied that to permanently acquire the property of a fellow Israelite was to defy God's divine distribution.⁶⁹ Moreover, it meant that God's intention was for land to be distributed as widely as possible,⁷⁰ ensuring approximate equality in the nation and economic self-sufficiency for familial groups.⁷¹

Applying their Faith

Whilst other passages apply Israel's faith to these societal issues,⁷² the most radical and comprehensive approach is the Jubilee and Sabbath Years of Leviticus 25.⁷³ The various issues surrounding land preservation, indebtedness, and landlessness are interwoven,⁷⁴ making a sequential study of the chapter somewhat complex. However, Leviticus 25 includes four main practices: letting the land lie fallow,⁷⁵ returning and redeeming land,⁷⁶ offering loans,⁷⁷ and releasing or redeeming slaves.⁷⁸ Discussing the chapter thematically will allow a clearer understanding of these practices and how they sought to address various societal issues Israel faced. This will be helpful for the purposes of this enquiry, since understanding how they addressed their societal issues will help in discerning how to address contemporary societal issues,⁷⁹ which will form the final section of this paper.

Letting the Land Lie Fallow (vs.1-7, 11-12, 18-22)

Before introducing the Jubilee Year, Leviticus 25 describes the Sabbath Year. This describes a practice observed by the whole land simultaneously, made explicit by the reference to 'the land' rather than 'your land'.⁸⁰ The fallow year was a corporate observance throughout the entire land which formed a visual reminder of the ecological motivation⁸¹ which seems to

⁶⁸ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, pp. 89-90.

⁶⁹ Lloyd R. Bailey, *Leviticus-Numbers* (Smyth and Helwys Bible Commentary; Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys, 2005), p. 302.

⁷⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 291.

⁷¹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 295.

⁷² Especially Exodus 21.2-11; 23.10-11; Deuteronomy 15.1-18.

⁷³ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), p. 189.

⁷⁴ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 199.

⁷⁵ Leviticus 25.11-12.

⁷⁶ Leviticus 25.10.

⁷⁷ Leviticus 25.35.

⁷⁸ Leviticus 25.10.

⁷⁹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 69.

⁸⁰ Bailey, p. 301, c.f. Exodus 23.11.

⁸¹ Budd, pp. 340-41.

underpin the law – allowing the land to observe a Sabbath rest.⁸² Although talk of an ‘ecological motivation’ is something of an anachronism, it reflects the underlying theology of creation which shaped Israel’s attitude towards the land. Since God created all things good and since people were responsible for God’s good creation, Israel was required to care for the land and this was expressed through giving it a Sabbath rest from human activity.⁸³

Whilst provision for all is discussed,⁸⁴ that is not law’s primary purpose and the focus is on the land. The awareness of the necessity of such a practice to ensure soil fertility may have been a motivating factor, but the emphasis of the law is on its benefit for the land, which can experience rest,⁸⁵ rather than for farmers who might subsequently enjoy increased yields. Hence the intrinsic value of creation is affirmed and the cycle of production and agriculture is interrupted, something which would have reinforced the significance of such a practice for their existence as the people of God.

Returning or Redeeming Land (vs.13-17, 23-34)

The Jubilee legislation subsequently allows for the redemption of any land that had been sold and requires the return of land in the Jubilee Year. While land was sometimes returned by royal decrees,⁸⁶ and whilst redemption did occur elsewhere,⁸⁷ the call for a year in which land automatically returned to its original owner was a radical proposal.

The first aspect of this legislation is simply that ‘In this year of Jubilee you shall return, every one of you, to your property.’⁸⁸ Underlying this simple statement is the land division arrangement within Israel, in which every extended family was designated land,⁸⁹ meaning that this legislation did not entrench the privileges of the minority but restored the equality, dignity, and economic independence of everyone.⁹⁰ However, since this only happened every fifty years, its primary aim was to protect the extended family rather than the individual, preventing the economic collapse of one generation and the condemnation of future generations to perpetual debt.⁹¹

⁸² Leviticus 25.2, 4.

⁸³ Hans Ucko, ‘The Jubilee as Challenge’ in *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Hans Ucko (ed.) (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), pp. 1-14 (p. 9).

⁸⁴ Leviticus 25.6-7.

⁸⁵ Leviticus 25.4.

⁸⁶ Fager, p. 25.

⁸⁷ Bergsma, p. 34.

⁸⁸ Leviticus 25.13 (NRSV).

⁸⁹ Michael Schluter and Roy Clements, *Reactivating the Extended Family: From Biblical Norms to Public Policy in Britain* (Cambridge: Jubilee Centre, 1986), pp. 5-7.

⁹⁰ Ringe, p. 27.

⁹¹ Wright, *God’s People in God’s Land*, p.124; Harris, pp. 87-88.

This practice of allowing families to return to their ancestral land had profound consequences. It meant that there could be no freehold market for land in Israel.⁹² Separation was made between land ownership and the right to a land's produce,⁹³ and any sale of land only involved selling the number of crops left before the next Jubilee.⁹⁴ Land was such a valuable productive resource that it could not be disposed of by individuals but had to be retained for the good of the whole family, including future generations.⁹⁵

Moreover, although land would be returned at the Jubilee, this did not prevent it being redeemed earlier, either by the individual or by a close relative.⁹⁶ Wright contends that, if a relative were to buy the land back, they would retain the land rather than returning it to the original owner.⁹⁷ This is supported by the later comments on giving loans rather than gifts to support the poor,⁹⁸ since otherwise there would be an incentive for those in difficult circumstances to sell land, at which point richer relatives would be required to redeem it and return it to them.⁹⁹ Hence, the purpose of this legislation seems to be retaining land within the wider kinship group rather than within an extended family.¹⁰⁰ The danger of this practice of redemption is that, whilst land would remain in the wider kinship group, it might end up being accumulated by a few powerful families. Hence the Jubilee year was a 'necessary "override"',¹⁰¹ guarding against such accumulation and ensuring that the fortunes of smaller familial groupings were also restored. This regular redistribution of land prevented the escalation of inequality and restored the broadly equitable distribution of land and the economic independence of extended families.¹⁰²

Offering Loans (vs.35-38)

Before describing the parallel legislation regarding releasing and redeeming slaves, Leviticus 25 deals with an intermediary state where someone becomes poor and lacks self-sufficiency.¹⁰³ The intention in these verses is

⁹² Schluter and Clements, p. 7.

⁹³ Fager, pp. 25-26.

⁹⁴ Leviticus 25.14-17; see W.H. Bellinger, Jr., *Leviticus, Numbers*, Volume 3 of *The New International Biblical Commentary*, Robert L. Hubbard Jr. and Robert K. Johnston (eds.) (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 2001), p. 150.

⁹⁵ Michael Schluter, 'Family' in *The Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda and Strategy for Christian Social Reform*, Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (eds.) (Nottingham: IVP, 2005), pp. 154-75 (p. 167).

⁹⁶ Leviticus 25.25-34.

⁹⁷ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, pp. 120-122.

⁹⁸ Leviticus 25.35-38.

⁹⁹ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 122.

¹⁰⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 295.

¹⁰¹ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 124.

¹⁰² Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 178.

¹⁰³ Leviticus 25.35.

to avoid them falling into slavery, as evidenced by the reminder of the exodus.¹⁰⁴ Rather than allowing such a fall into servitude, there is a call for support from the wider community. In an agrarian setting, farmers could suffer bad years because of blight or pests,¹⁰⁵ and if they could not survive until the next harvest they might have to resort to selling their land and then themselves. These verses encourage generosity toward the poor to ensure that their slide into poverty did not continue. The interest-free nature of these loans means there was no financial incentive for offering them. Instead loans were given to close friends or family to support them and create a ‘network of obligations’¹⁰⁶ which would ensure the availability of such loans when others encountered difficulty.¹⁰⁷ In essence such loans formed an informal welfare system wherein support was offered by those whose harvests were plentiful to those who were struggling, with the knowledge that, in the unpredictable context of subsistence farming, one day they too might need such support.

Releasing or Redeeming Slaves (vs.39-55)

Such loans could not guarantee a recovery of fortunes and those who suffered several bad harvests could find themselves in a downward spiral where they had to sell off more land to pay debts, decreasing future yields and rendering debts unpayable. In these cases their only remaining asset was their ability to work, and they might have to sell themselves into slavery to work off their debts.¹⁰⁸ This demonstrates how seriously debt repayment was taken and that this legislation in no way rewards irresponsibility.¹⁰⁹

The legislation regarding such slavery parallels the earlier legislation about land. Just as the land was to be returned at the Jubilee, so slaves were to be released, and by implication, any debts which had caused such slavery were to be cancelled.¹¹⁰ This had the result of relativizing the price of a slave, since they were not really selling themselves but rather a number of years of labour until the next Jubilee.¹¹¹ As with land, redemption was permitted prior to the Jubilee, either by the individual or by relatives.¹¹² Redemption by relatives would probably not have led to complete freedom, but to working

¹⁰⁴ Leviticus 25.38.

¹⁰⁵ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, pp. 169-171.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Schluter, ‘Welfare’ in *The Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda and Strategy for Christian Social Reform*, Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (eds.) (Nottingham: IVP, 2005), pp. 175-95 (p. 181).

¹⁰⁷ Schluter ‘Welfare’, pp. 180-181.

¹⁰⁸ Bellinger, p. 153.

¹⁰⁹ Paul Mills, ‘Finance’ in *The Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda and Strategy for Christian Social Reform*, Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (eds.) (Nottingham: IVP, 2005), pp. 196-215 (p. 206).

¹¹⁰ Ringe, p. 26.

¹¹¹ Leviticus 25.50-52.

¹¹² Leviticus 25.48.

for these relatives,¹¹³ something which, given they would have been landless, was a necessity for survival. Essentially they would live under the protection of this relative,¹¹⁴ much as a resident alien would, working their land and living on its produce, dependent on them for provision until the next Jubilee Year. Such benevolent treatment is demanded from any owner, whether they are a close relative or not,¹¹⁵ and even if they are non-Israelite.¹¹⁶ However, close relatives would have greater motivation for generous treatment, given their relational ties and since they would depend on such relatives if they fell into poverty. Beyond such relational obligations, the exodus provides the wider motivation for humane treatment.¹¹⁷ The Israelites' identity as redeemed slaves necessitated identification with the vulnerable in society, making it impossible to regard slaves as sub-human and resulting in them being treated as hired workers rather than slaves. Hence, rather than slavery being a permanent consequence of indebtedness, which reduced people to a sub-human level and resulted in oppressive treatment, this consequence of indebtedness was minimized, albeit not eradicated.

The Contribution of these Practices

Having examined these different practices which make up the Jubilee legislation, it is now possible to summarize how they contributed to Israel's distinctive approach to the societal problems of indebtedness, land-loss and land preservation as well as the further issue of wealth accumulation which they imply.

The fallow year embedded an approach to the land which affirmed its intrinsic value and its need for rest. The land was given rest not *for* human activity but *from* human activity and *for* its own sake.¹¹⁸ This is rooted in a theology of creation which affirms its goodness and the observance of a Sabbath day which expresses dependence upon God and the importance of rest.

The return and redemption of land, offering of loans and the release and redemption of slaves all address issues of poverty, indebtedness, inequality and self-sufficiency. They are rooted in the experience of the exodus, which reveals God's concern about liberation and economic oppression.¹¹⁹ Indeed, the Jubilee is appropriately referred to by Padilla as 'a

¹¹³ Bailey, p. 306.

¹¹⁴ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 293.

¹¹⁵ Leviticus 25.40.

¹¹⁶ Leviticus 25.54.

¹¹⁷ Leviticus 25.42, 55.

¹¹⁸ Ucko, p. 9.

¹¹⁹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 156.

sort of institutionalized exodus',¹²⁰ which ensures a regular experience of liberation within Israel. Moreover, these practices are grounded in the land division and the intention of God to ensure a broadly equal distribution of land, allowing self-sufficiency for all.¹²¹ By cancelling debts, releasing slaves and returning land, the Jubilee prevented inequality becoming entrenched beyond generational lines,¹²² protected families from the misfortunes or mismanagement of individuals,¹²³ restored what was lost,¹²⁴ and offered a fresh start and renewed self-sufficiency.¹²⁵

Towards Contemporary Application

Applying Leviticus 25 to contemporary socio-political and environmental issues requires careful consideration about which contemporary issues are analogous to the societal issues faced by Israel. This will not require complete parallels, but there must be sufficient similarity to suggest that the ancient story of the Jubilee legislation intersects and impacts our contemporary story at these points.¹²⁶ Having ascertained a number of contemporary issues with sufficient points of contact with the issues addressed in Leviticus 25, it will then be possible to consider how to address these issues in light of the Jubilee, considering what responses might be suggested by Israel's legislation.

The interpretative complexity behind making such connections must be acknowledged,¹²⁷ particularly the danger that issues coincide with 'our immediate social interest or moral passion'.¹²⁸ This does not automatically mean, however, that such issues are not addressed by the text or are unimportant to God. Instead, since perfect objectivity is impossible, there is a need to critique our own arguments and those of others to reach the best conclusions we can about the appropriateness of connections between the Jubilee legislation and contemporary issues. This task of mutual critique will be undertaken now, as part of an identification of contemporary environmental and socio-political issues which seem to have legitimate connections with the Jubilee practices.

¹²⁰ Padilla, p. 22.

¹²¹ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 56.

¹²² Harris, pp. 87-88.

¹²³ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 208.

¹²⁴ Harris, p. 79.

¹²⁵ Paul Spray, 'Five Areas for Jubilee Today', in *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Hans Ucko (ed.) (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), pp. 134-139 (p. 134).

¹²⁶ Brueggemann et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 3.

¹²⁷ Walter Brueggemann, *A Pathway of Interpretation: The Old Testament for Pastors and Students* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008), p. 19.

¹²⁸ Brueggemann, *A Pathway of Interpretation*, p. 23.

Environmental Issues

The fallow year practice, affirming the intrinsic value of creation and the importance of allowing the land to rest from human activity, most naturally connects wherever over-intensive human activity has detrimental effects on the environment. One obvious point of connection is with over-intensive farming,¹²⁹ which leads to soil erosion, deforestation and desertification,¹³⁰ the depletion of nutrients and the exhaustion of fresh-water supplies.¹³¹

A second contemporary issue is climate change, wherein over-intensive human activity is damaging not just one area of land, but the whole planet.¹³² The parallels here are less direct, since climate change is a consequence of industrial globalization rather than agricultural practices. However, global warming is widely agreed to be caused by over-intensive human activity,¹³³ and the principles of affirming the intrinsic value of creation and allowing the land to rest from human activity are entirely appropriate to addressing this peculiarly modern problem.

Whilst Cyril Rodd suggests that applying the Bible to contemporary environmental issues is an example of reading our own agenda back into it,¹³⁴ a failure to see God's concern for creation within the Old Testament seems to be a greater danger. It allows modern anthropocentrism to turn creation into a resource to be used and exploited for human progress¹³⁵ rather than as God's creation to be cared for by humans in the same way that God would.¹³⁶

Socio-Political Issues

The interconnected practices of return and redemption of land, offering of loans, and the release and redemption of slaves address issues of indebtedness, slavery, land-loss, and wealth accumulation. There are parallels here with contemporary socio-political issues, especially those regarding global inequality.

¹²⁹ Ken Gnanakan, *God's World: Biblical Insights for a Theology of the Environment* (SPCK International Study Guides; London: SPCK, 1999), p. 78.

¹³⁰ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, pp. 104-105.

¹³¹ Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz, 'The Jubilee: Time Ceilings for the Growth of Money?' in *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Hans Ucko (ed.) (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), pp. 104-111 (p. 111).

¹³² IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2007: Working Group 1: The Physical Science Basis, 9.4.1.2 'Simulations of the Twentieth Century', http://www.ipcc.ch/publications_and_data/ar4/wg1/en/ch9s9-4-1-2.html [accessed on 3 September 2014].

¹³³ IPCC Fourth Assessment Report: 9.4.1.2.

¹³⁴ Cyril Rodd, *Glimpses of a Strange Land: Studies in Old Testament Ethics* (Edinburgh: T and T Clark, 2001), p. 249.

¹³⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *Ethics of Hope*, Kindle Edition (London: SCM, 2012), location 1502.

¹³⁶ Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, p. 121.

First, international debt has trapped many of the world's poorest nations in a state of permanent indebtedness akin to those in the ancient world who had no hope of repaying their debts.¹³⁷ Where whole countries face seemingly permanent consequences of indebtedness, these Jubilee practices which offered liberation and a fresh start seem to connect naturally.

Second, although slavery has apparently been abolished,¹³⁸ 'the slave-like exploitation of labourers is on the increase under the pressure of competitiveness on the global market.'¹³⁹ Whilst modern-day slavery differs significantly from the slave trade,¹⁴⁰ its connections with the bonded labour of ancient society are surprisingly clear. Humans are still sold as a commodity as a result of the desperation of impoverishment and forced to work in exploitative conditions with no hope of freedom, and therefore this is an issue which resonates with the Jubilee.

Third, just as land-loss was an issue in ancient Israel, so land expropriation is a contemporary issue. Land is routinely bought from poor nations either by other countries or by international corporations to produce food for export.¹⁴¹ Local populations are denied access to the productive resource of their land, denying them self-sufficiency and creating a contemporary issue of landlessness.

Finally, the issue of wealth accumulation continues today, with the richest 1% owning 48% of global wealth in 2014.¹⁴² The Jubilee legislation sought to prevent the accumulation of land,¹⁴³ the primary commodity in any agrarian society.¹⁴⁴ Whilst the forms of capital have changed, the process of accumulation continues¹⁴⁵ and the contemporary world, just like ancient Israel, needs some means of preventing ever-increasing inequality.

Addressing Contemporary Social Issues

Having established the case for drawing connections between the Jubilee legislation and these contemporary issues, it is now necessary to consider how to address these issues. In order to maintain continuity with the Jubilee,

¹³⁷ Michael S. Northcott, *Life After Debt: Christianity and Global Justice* (London: SPCK, 1999), p. 21.

¹³⁸ Ucko, p. 13.

¹³⁹ Raiser, p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ Ucko, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ *Rethinking Global Land Use in an Urban Era*, ed. by Karen C. Seto and Anette Reenberg (Strüngmann Forum Reports; Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2014), pp. 185-186.

¹⁴² Deborah Hardoon, 'Wealth: Having it all and Wanting More' (Oxfam Issue Briefing; Oxford: Oxfam GB, 2015), p. 2.

¹⁴³ Wright, *God's People in God's Land*, p. 124.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Piketty, *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Kindle Edition, trans. by Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), location 796.

¹⁴⁵ Piketty, location 7664.

these suggestions will focus upon concrete societal proposals rather than individual lifestyle suggestions.

Over-farming

Over-intensive farming causes numerous problems in the contemporary world: the depletion of vital nutrients which reduces yields; the exhaustion of freshwater supplies;¹⁴⁶ pollution of the environment;¹⁴⁷ soil erosion and desertification which affect the long-term viability of the land;¹⁴⁸ and deforestation which damages natural habitats to provide land for agriculture.¹⁴⁹ In this context Ucko is surely right that ‘more than ever we have come to realize that the land needs to be given rest from us’.¹⁵⁰

However, there is a question of how to give the land rest without depriving the poor of food, since the intention of the Jubilee practices was that ‘none need fear diminishment by observance of the land's sabbatical year’.¹⁵¹ A literal application of the fallow year¹⁵² or a return to small-scale non-industrial farming would not provide sufficient food for the global population.¹⁵³ The question therefore is how to make modern farming sustainable.¹⁵⁴ Crop rotation¹⁵⁵ and appropriate use of fertilizers can prevent nutrient depletion, whilst technologies such as drip irrigation can halve water use.¹⁵⁶ Moreover, the dangers of genetically modified crops may have been unjustifiably exaggerated¹⁵⁷ and they may be part of the solution to providing more food with less environmental damage,¹⁵⁸ offering a way of giving the land rest whilst maintaining global food supply.

If the land is to be given real rest, however, sustainable farming must be complemented by practices which reduce demand. This requires dietary change, since population growth and increasing meat consumption will

¹⁴⁶ Gurbir S. Bhullar, ‘Talking Agricultural Sustainability Issues: an Interview with Dr Gurdev Khush’ in *Agricultural Sustainability: Progress and Prospects in Crop Research*, Gurbir S. Bhullar and Navreet K. Bhullar (eds.) (London: Elsevier, 2013), pp. 247-48.

¹⁴⁷ Bhullar, pp. 247-48.

¹⁴⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 413.

¹⁴⁹ Northcott, *Life After Debt*, p. 13.

¹⁵⁰ Ucko, p. 9.

¹⁵¹ Samuel E. Balentine, *Leviticus*, (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville: John Knox Press, 2002) p. 195.

¹⁵² Harris, p. 23.

¹⁵³ Bhullar, p. 248.

¹⁵⁴ Andrew J. Kirk, *What is Mission? Some Theological Explorations* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1999), p. 182.

¹⁵⁵ Padilla, p. 15.

¹⁵⁶ Michael Guebert, ‘Water for Life: Global Freshwater Resources’, in *Keeping God's Earth*, Noah J. Toly and Daniel I. Block (eds.) (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), pp. 143-64 (pp. 147-48).

¹⁵⁷ Bhullar, p. 249.

¹⁵⁸ Bhullar, p. 247.

require a predicted 42% more cropland by 2050.¹⁵⁹ Reducing meat consumption would address deforestation by lessening the pressure for land¹⁶⁰ and would free up food currently used for animals to feed the global population. This approach is not simply an individual lifestyle suggestion but a social proposal. Alongside regulation which sets minimum standards for sustainable agricultural practices, there could be a limit set on the proportion of land used for animals. Such a reduction in the strains on the environment would make sustainable practices more achievable, since the demand for ever-increasing productivity would be lessened; this would give the land rest without depriving the poor of food.

Climate Change

Climate change suggests a broader sense in which the land needs rest from human activity.¹⁶¹ It is clear that this cannot be addressed by a literal fallow year. Instead, there need to be practices which reduce greenhouse gas emissions and Sir John Houghton suggests four: ending deforestation; improving energy efficiency; increasing renewable energy supplies; and capturing carbon.¹⁶²

Deforestation accounts for 20% of anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions¹⁶³ and reducing agricultural demand by limiting meat production would help. Moreover, extending forest certification, ensuring that producers meet sustainability standards, would lead to better forest management,¹⁶⁴ ensuring, for example, that trees are replanted. Energy efficiency can be addressed in the transport sector by improving fuel efficiency; in the construction sector by using better insulation and combined heat and power;¹⁶⁵ and in the retail sector by addressing the energy efficiency of products. Renewable energy requires investment in technologies and public subsidies for these sectors in order for these alternative forms of energy to become viable. Carbon capture will be necessary, given the continued building of coal-powered power stations, especially in the developing world.¹⁶⁶ Whilst it may be unreasonable to suppose that such building can be

¹⁵⁹ 'Changing Global Diets is Vital to Reducing Climate Change' (Office of External Affairs, University of Aberdeen, 2014), <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/news/6673/> [accessed on 1 September 2014].

¹⁶⁰ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 417.

¹⁶¹ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 412.

¹⁶² Sir John Houghton, 'The Changing Global Climate: Evidence, Impacts, Adaption and Abatement', in *Keeping God's Earth*, Noah J. Toly and Daniel I. Block (eds.) (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), pp. 187-215 (pp. 204-05).

¹⁶³ Houghton, pp. 204-05.

¹⁶⁴ Gamini Herath, 'Climate Change and Global Environmental Governance: The Asian Experience', in *Governance Approaches to Mitigation of and Adaptation to Climate Change in Asia*, Tek Nath Dhakal and Huong Ha (eds.) (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 68-86 (p. 78).

¹⁶⁵ Houghton, p. 205.

¹⁶⁶ Herath, p. 75.

halted, use could be made of carbon sequestering technologies which limit their environmental impact.¹⁶⁷

Moreover, there is again need to reduce demand. Rather than relying upon the decisions of individuals, markets could be required to take into account environmental costs,¹⁶⁸ thus making longer-lasting and locally produced goods more competitive, encouraging energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy. Northcott persuasively argues that 'The only solution is a global and statutory framework... which legally prescribes mandated emissions reductions.'¹⁶⁹ Only such a legal framework would motivate the actions required to tackle climate change and to give the land rest from over-intensive human activity and would be in line with the Jubilee legislation itself.

International Debt

The issue of international debt precipitated interest in the Jubilee Year, through the Jubilee 2000 campaign. The calls for a limitation of the consequences of debt, with future generations not being condemned but given a fresh start, have strong connections with the Jubilee legislation. International debt was largely contracted by dictators, rarely benefitting the wider populace,¹⁷⁰ and contributed to an ever-deepening spiral of impoverishment for the global poor. The Jubilee 2000 campaign called for debt cancellation¹⁷¹ and had some success.¹⁷² However, given this was a one-off declaration of debt forgiveness, it has more parallels with the royal decrees of 'release' than with the Jubilee legislation.

A more appropriate response would be a regular opportunity for release from the slavery of indebtedness, which ensures that the debts of one generation cannot enslave future generations indefinitely. One proposal is the creation of an international bankruptcy law.¹⁷³ There appear to be no reasons why this cannot be extended to nations, and Raiser offers no reason why it 'contradicts the logic of the global financial system'¹⁷⁴ when it simply extends an established practice within nations. Although the availability of

¹⁶⁷ Houghton, p. 206.

¹⁶⁸ Ronald J. Sider, 'Evaluating the Triumph of the Market', in *The Jubilee Challenge: Utopia or Possibility? Jewish and Christian Insights*, Hans Ucko (ed.) (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1997), pp. 112-33 (p. 119).

¹⁶⁹ Michael S. Northcott, *A Moral Climate: The Ethics of Global Warming* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2007), p. 284.

¹⁷⁰ Northcott, *Life After Debt*, pp. 8-9.

¹⁷¹ Northcott, *Life After Debt*, p. 24.

¹⁷² Paul Mills, 'Finance', in *The Jubilee Manifesto: A Framework, Agenda and Strategy for Christian Social Reform*, Michael Schluter and John Ashcroft (eds.) (Nottingham: IVP, 2005), pp. 196-215 (p. 196).

¹⁷³ Northcott, *Life After Debt*, p. 21.

¹⁷⁴ Raiser, p. 25.

credit would be a natural incentive to avoid such bankruptcy, there would also have to be a limit on its regularity. A forty-nine or fifty-year minimum period between bankruptcies could allow for a periodic fresh start without rewarding irresponsibility. Such a law would embody Jubilee principles, preventing intergenerational indebtedness and allowing for a periodic fresh start free from debt.

Modern-Day Slavery

It is difficult to contend with the intuitive response that the God of the exodus, who demanded the regular proclamation of liberty within Israel, would likewise proclaim liberty to trafficked peoples, especially child labourers and those forced into the sex trade.¹⁷⁵ Moreover, since the Jubilee legislation deals with the issue of harsh working conditions,¹⁷⁶ it connects with exploitative working practices more generally, even when slavery is not the primary issue.

Regarding slavery, Kevin Bales makes clear that this does not require fresh legislation, since the legal frameworks outlawing slavery exist in most parts of the world.¹⁷⁷ However, the disparity between the legal status of slavery and its ongoing practice implies that enforcement is lacking. Increasing the resources devoted to detecting and dismantling slave-rings would enable the good intentions of slavery legislation to be enacted.¹⁷⁸ Moreover, if companies were legally responsible for their supply chains, then the vast corporate resources used to find suppliers could help to detect and eliminate the use of slavery.¹⁷⁹

Whilst there is international agreement about the illegality of slavery, no such agreement exists regarding basic working conditions. Individual countries have set minimum wages, maximum hours and requirements regarding safe conditions, but international agreement would prevent the global market rewarding slave-like exploitation of the workforce.¹⁸⁰ Such a task is complicated by the importance for developing nations of competing on wage costs to encourage investment and improve living standards.¹⁸¹ Hence, any agreement must take into account the local cost of living,

¹⁷⁵ Harris, p. 73.

¹⁷⁶ Leviticus 25.39-40.

¹⁷⁷ Kevin Bales, 'Slavery in its Contemporary Manifestations', in *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*, Jean Allain (ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 282-304 (p. 304).

¹⁷⁸ Bales, p. 304.

¹⁷⁹ Bales, p. 290.

¹⁸⁰ Raiser p. 25.

¹⁸¹ Sider, p.114.

allowing for wage competition whilst ensuring that some basic rights are given to workers.

These twin proposals would embody the Jubilee legislation by liberating those working as slaves and preventing the harsh treatment of workers, both of which are concerns of Leviticus 25.¹⁸²

Land Expropriation

Since 2007 there has been an increase in ‘land grabbing’, with poorer nations selling off vast swathes of land to foreign countries or international corporations investing in agricultural land.¹⁸³ For example, in the Punjab province of Pakistan, 800,000 acres of land were sold to the United Arab Emirates, resulting in the displacement of approximately 64,000 subsistence farmers.¹⁸⁴ Such practices are clearly unjust and Joireman observes that ‘there is a rare consensus between law makers, development specialists, and local citizens that clear property rights are desirable’.¹⁸⁵ Just as the Jubilee established property rights within Israel, property rights need to be established today.

Moreover, as the Jubilee traditions made clear, land is such a valuable resource that selling it permanently leads to the irreversible impoverishment of future generations and there ought to be limits on how land can be disposed of. Just as individuals did not have the right to dispose of familial lands in ancient Israel, so a contemporary enactment of Jubilee principles might be to restrict governments selling off land for short-term profit at the expense of future generations. There could be a system where land is not sold permanently but leased for up to fifty years. Agricultural land could be ‘bought’ for this set period of time, whilst companies could bid for contracts to run mines or oil wells rather than permanently buying them. Developing countries would still be able to use their land as a means of gaining capital and foreign investment would continue, bringing more jobs and better wages to local populations.¹⁸⁶ This would give developing nations greater bargaining power and the ability to periodically reconsider how they use their land and resources. In order for this proposal to benefit the wider population, there would need to be conditions placed upon governments

¹⁸² Leviticus 25.10, 39-43.

¹⁸³ *Rethinking Global Land Use in an Urban Era*, pp. 185-186.

¹⁸⁴ Daniel Shephard, ‘Land Grabbing and Potential Implications for World Food Security’, in *Sustainable Agricultural Development: Recent Approaches in Resources Management and Environmentally-Balanced Production Enhancement*, Mohammed Behnassi, Shabbir A. Shahid and Joyce D’Silva (eds.) (London: Springer, 2011), pp. 25-42 (p. 32).

¹⁸⁵ Joireman, Sandra F., *Where there is No Government: Enforcing Property Rights in Common Law Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 154.

¹⁸⁶ Sider, p. 114.

requiring that money generated from these resources was used for the good of the wider population, something which would require addressing the corruption endemic in many parts of the world.¹⁸⁷

Wealth Accumulation

In the Ancient Near East, wealth accumulation occurred through the self-reinforcing process whereby those with the most land would obtain the greatest yields and would therefore acquire more land from others in difficulty. For this reason, ‘the Jubilee existed to protect... an equitable and widespread distribution of the land, and to prevent the accumulation of ownership in the hands of a wealthy few’.¹⁸⁸

In the contemporary world wealth accumulation persists, with inequality increasing towards the situation where the top 1% own 50% of all wealth.¹⁸⁹ Since large portfolios produce returns far surpassing the rate of growth, the cumulative effect is that wealth becomes increasingly concentrated.¹⁹⁰ The Jubilee encourages thought about how to achieve greater self-sufficiency for all through a more equitable distribution of resources. The twentieth century has seen some innovative attempts to address inequality, most notably progressive taxation on incomes (by which those earning more contribute more) and inheritance taxes.¹⁹¹ Progressive income tax provides a means of redistributing wealth, enabling the creation of the modern welfare state. Moreover, inheritance taxes limit the accumulation of wealth over generational lines, something with resonance in the Jubilee. Unfortunately, neither of these taxes have much impact on the very wealthiest, who are able to avoid both taxes by reinvesting the majority of their income and by using trust funds or tax avoidance schemes.¹⁹²

The simplest way to limit extreme inequality and wealth accumulation in the contemporary world seems to be to introduce a progressive global wealth tax. This would avoid international competition on tax rates¹⁹³ and would allow tax to be levied on the largest fortunes to limit their growth either in line with inflation (to prevent growing inequality) or at slightly less than inflation (to gradually reduce inequality).¹⁹⁴ This would not require a global administration but simply co-operation between nations who would

¹⁸⁷ Laurence Cockcroft, *Global Corruption: Money, Power and Ethics in the Modern World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), p. xiii.

¹⁸⁸ Wright, *The Mission of God*, p. 296.

¹⁸⁹ Hardoon, p. 2.

¹⁹⁰ Piketty, location 7646-7648.

¹⁹¹ Piketty, location 8593-8594.

¹⁹² Piketty, location 9216-9217.

¹⁹³ Piketty, location 8646-8648.

¹⁹⁴ Piketty, location 9301-9304.

agree a common level of taxation. When considered as an extension of the existing tax system, this could be regarded as a way of applying the existing principle of progressive taxation to all wealth.¹⁹⁵ Moreover, when considered in light of Jubilee principles, it offers a way of preventing limitless accumulation and enabling greater redistribution within the very different contemporary context.

Conclusion

The above proposals are one attempt to consider how the Jubilee might 'intersect and impact our contemporary story'.¹⁹⁶ The Jubilee itself addressed care of creation, indebtedness, slave-labour, land-loss, and wealth accumulation. This paper has suggested that over-farming, climate change, international debt, modern-day slavery, land expropriation, and global inequality are contemporary manifestations of problems similar to those faced by ancient Israel. Rather than seeking to apply the Jubilee literally to these issues, there has been an attempt to address these issues creatively in a way inspired by the Jubilee but appropriate to the contemporary context. This has led to suggestions to address over-farming by adopting more sustainable farming practices and limiting meat consumption, thus giving the land rest. It has also been suggested that the land can be given a rest from the human thirst for energy by agreeing legally binding targets which require countries to find ways of reducing carbon emissions. Moreover, the effects of debt could be limited beyond generational lines by the adoption of an international bankruptcy law which would address the issue of unpayable international debts. Laws which outlaw slavery could be effectively enforced and international agreement could be reached regarding basic rights for all workers, embodying the Jubilee's call to liberate the oppressed and to avoid harsh treatment of workers. Property rights could be extended, preventing land expropriation and a system of long-term leasing could be introduced to enable a wider distribution of the earth's productive resources. Finally, just as the Jubilee sought to limit accumulation and redistribute wealth, a global wealth tax could provide an appropriate way to limit accumulation and redistribute wealth today. Whilst these proposals are given as contributions to a discussion rather than the final word on what God says, the suggestion is that they do provide a way to embody Jubilee principles today.

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¹⁹⁵ Piketty, location 9225-9226.

¹⁹⁶ Bruggemann et al., *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 3.

Book Review

Albert Wardin, *On the Edge: Baptists and Other Free Church Evangelicals in Tsarist Russia, 1855-1917* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 533pp. ISBN 978-1-62032-962-7

This is a skilfully written survey of Slavic evangelicals from their beginnings to a crucial moment in history – the Russian October Revolution in 1917. The book belongs in the same category as Walter Sawatsky's *Soviet Evangelicals Since World War II*, though covering a different time period. A logical sequel to Wardin's book might be Heather Coleman's *Russian Baptists and Spiritual Revolution 1905-1929*.

Albert Wardin, Professor Emeritus at Belmont University and veteran expert on Slavic evangelicals, has contributed an impressive volume to Baptist and Mennonite Brethren studies and to the wider field of Slavic studies. In 1995 Wardin published *Evangelical Sectarianism in the Russian Empire and the USSR*, and, in *On the Edge*, he continues to use his phenomenal bibliographic knowledge to build a coherent and multifaceted picture of Slavic evangelicals before Soviet times.

Wardin utilizes a vast amount of periodical articles, in German, Russian, and English. It would have been helpful to indicate exactly where some of these relatively rare publications can be found. I also missed a more detailed topical index, though the name index is helpful. The 15-page bibliography is certainly useful for anyone researching a narrower topic in the field and, having been created by one of the best specialists on Russian evangelicals in the Anglo-American world, it contains informative surprises.

This book offers a fresh look at the beginnings of Stundism, Mennonite Brethren and Baptists in Imperial Russia. The author explains evangelical-state relations, delineates the development of the sectarians' activities and ministries, and analyzes links between the Free Church movements themselves. One of the revealing subtopics is Mennonite Brethren and Baptist relations; another is Baptist and Evangelical Christians' somewhat 'rocky' history of mutual acknowledgement. This volume differs from many others in that the author seeks to see Slavic Free Church movements as a whole and to recognize the connections between them.

In conclusion, this is an excellent introduction to the fascinating story of Slavic evangelicals. It is a well-rendered narrative of Baptists and other Free Church bodies in Tsarist Russia, telling the colourful story of their beginnings and growth.

Reviewed by Toivo Pilli